

An Investigation into Discourses of Learning in Schools

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Abstract

This thesis reports a research project describing the discourses of learning in four UK schools. It describes how people in the schools use language about learning. There have been few comparable studies of the discourses of learning.

A rationale for studying discourses is presented, arguing that discourses constitute meanings, including the meanings of learning. It makes an argument that the study of discourses of learning in schools can make a useful contribution to understanding learning in schools.

Research was carried out in two primary and two secondary schools, in London and the Midlands, which had been involved in programmes to develop learning. Data was gathered from conversations with students and teachers, from classroom and other observations and from documentary materials. This was analysed to produce a description of three discourses: performance, work and learning.

The findings have implications for those concerned with effective learning in schools. Performance discourse operates in all four schools, but despite the UK policy context, it is challenged by other discourses. The discourse of work is especially dominant in classrooms. It is argued that the discourses of work and performance reflect meagre views of learning and do not encourage an understanding of effective learning. The richer discourse of learning was evident, but harder to find than the others.

This study makes a contribution to understanding the complexity of learning in schools. The constitutive nature of the discourses, the influence on the discourses of different contexts and of the contributory learning perspectives are all explored. The schools and classrooms where a richer discourse of learning operates are examined for what they can tell us about working against the grain of the performance and work discourses.

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Chapter 1. Introduction - *you learn more if you explain to people*

Annie: You learn more because if you explain to people what to do, you say things that you wouldn't say to yourself, really. So you learn things that you wouldn't know if you were just doing it by yourself (Lodge, 1997: 7).

I met Annie, a Year 7 (Y7) pupil in an outer London comprehensive school while undertaking research for an earlier project for this degree. She was one of four students interviewed and impressed me because she was more articulate than the others about her learning. She said something important about the power of talk about learning. She noted the significance of social activity in learning. She was aware that an ability to talk about learning is in itself a strategy for learning things you might otherwise miss and that dialogue creates learning. She had a view of learning that went beyond notions of quantity (you learn things that you wouldn't know) and she did not confuse learning with work.

These themes are explored in this thesis. I set out to describe the variety of discourses of learning found in a range of public sector schools in England. By discourses I mean what was said about learning, how it was said, the different as well as the shared meanings of learning. I took the view that learning may be talked about in different ways and that the differences have an importance. The differences are expressed in the talk and actions of people in the schools, in its structures, routines and documentation. Some of these meanings were expressed directly:

I learn because people tell me (John, Sec 1 Y10)¹.

It's just a matter of remembering all this (Science teacher to Y11 class, Sec 1).

Some meanings were much more indirectly indicated, like the primary children's belief that to be given the answer to a problem would prevent them learning:

He [the teacher] explains what actually happens, but he doesn't exactly tell us the answer, otherwise we wouldn't learn anything (Aysha, Pri 1 Y4).

¹ All quotations referenced in this way are from research undertaken for this project

My previous experience of schools had led me to fear that the language in use by both teachers and students about learning draws on rather meagre views of learning. I had been struck by the limited articulation of Annie and her fellow students when I had interviewed them in 1997. They were hardly able to describe any strategies or processes that helped them with their learning. They appeared to be drawing on views of learning that were impoverished. My explorations of this field with colleagues have led to an understanding of the importance of construction and co-construction in learning (see for example Watkins *et al*, 1996; Carnell & Lodge, forthcoming). This view of learning sees learners as active in constructing meanings, connecting them to existing meanings through dialogue. Effective learners, in this view, are active and strategic, skilled in co-operation, develop their own goals and are articulate about their own learning. Discourses of learning reflect these richer or more meagre views. This study was intended to more fully explore the discourses of learning in schools.

The study of the discourses of learning is not a thriving area of study. There are studies of young people's and teachers' conceptions of learning. But the discourses, the ways in which young people can access richer understandings of learning, are not explored. Much of the work into discourses has been concerned with how children acquire language, (both first and second languages), and how they develop their literacy. As a result they often focus on teacher's talk *to* learners. In this study I focus on talk *between* students, *between* teachers and *between* teachers and students. My approach has a long history in sociolinguistics. In the 1970s Heath studied the development of the use of language by children in three communities in the Piedmont Carolinas, USA, and located the development of different language use within these communities. She drew attention to the significance of communities in learning to use language:

This book argues that in Roadville and Trackton the different ways children learned to use language were dependent on the ways in which each community structured their families, defined the roles that community members could assume, and played on their concepts of childhood that guided child socialization ... In communities throughout the world, these and other features of the cultural milieu affect the ways in which each child

learns to use language. The place of language in the cultural life of each social group is interdependent with the habits and values of behaving shared among members of that group (Heath, 1983: 11).

The next two chapters discuss the main features of discourses, of their study and how the study of discourses of learning can contribute to knowledge about learning. In Chapter 4 I describe a set of three discourses that I identified from the literature. To gather data for this study I drew on ethnographic methods, particularly observation, as well as interviews and documentary evidence. The rationale for this approach, what happened when I collected the data, some of the issues involved and how the data were analysed is discussed in Chapter 5.

In collecting and analysing the data I was seeking answers to questions raised in Chapters 1 to 4. In order to become articulate about learning young people need to be inducted into a rich discourse of learning facilitated by 'discourse guides' – such as teachers (Mercer, 2000). In this study therefore, I have been concerned to explore the shared and separate discourses of both students and teachers. I took as my focus the context of the school and in particular three sets of discursive relationship between students, between teachers and between teachers and students.

Some people have suggested that there are nested layers in communicating messages. In schools these are small groups, the classrooms, the whole school, and then the school's local and national contexts (Pearce & Cronin, 1980). Others have challenged this and suggested that you can see these not as layers, but as contexts for the other categories (Hoffman, 1992). Thus the context for discourse in the classroom is the school and also the external environment, including national policy. The focus of this study is the three relationships mentioned above (between students, between teachers and between teachers and students). One question to be considered is how these different contexts impact on the discourses of learning in schools and particularly on those in which young people operate.

The borders of the different communities are also significant. I would argue that school effectiveness and improvement (SESI) research, dedicated to

identifying those factors that are specific to the effective school has ignored the permeability of the school boundaries. Some school improvement writers have suggested that all improvement and effectiveness efforts will be found in the school, sometimes within one person – such as a superhead – without reference to the very real and deep issues in which the schools' communities are embedded. (See for example *Success Against the Odds* (National Commission, 1996)).

Heath concluded her book by voicing her concerns about the growing dominance in schools of a particular, narrow discourse. My professional concerns are rooted in school improvement and I am concerned about a similarly narrow discourse in this field. Wrigley drew attention to it in a recent critique:

It is based around *control and organisation*, and its discourse and methodology effectively suppresses this other story, so that the cultures and actions which truly support achievement are insufficiently understood (Wrigley, 2000: 23; emphasis in original).

Outside schools the official story of control and organisation dominates, but inside schools other stories are also audible, although not perhaps as strongly as Wrigley would like. SESI research does not adequately explore the connection between internal conditions and their impact on students' learning. While it is widely acknowledged in school improvement literature that the school is the unit or centre of change and therefore is rightly a focus for improvement efforts, other levels – especially the classroom – are increasingly being seen as important sites for school improvement endeavours. A recent study of several schools and their school improvement activities found that while both tactical and strategic approaches may have helped with some improvement, sustained improvement was based on a focus on learning (Gray *et al*, 1999).

Effective learning needs a rich discourse of learning to empower the learner to monitor and reflect on their own learning. Developing effective learning processes is tough in situations where the dominant mode is of control and compliance. I hoped to find discourses of learning that empower the learner,

that connect to the lives of learners, that engender courage and confidence, to refer to Wrigley's other story. This discourse also needs to be rich to reflect the different understandings, habits and values of the varied communities from which young people in schools come, and to embrace complexity.

So my research is concerned with these areas:

- What are the discourses of learning used in the school?
- What views of learning do they reflect?
- What other discourses might affect the discourses of learning?
- Are different discourses of learning used by different groups in the school?
- Do the different discourses empower students to become effective learners?
- What might the influences be that shape the discourses?
- What are the implications of these discourses for the conditions that promote learning?
- How might this be researched and what are the difficulties in doing this?
- And what are the implications of all this for young people, their teachers, families and policy makers?

When I started out, my previous experiences as a teacher and researcher led me to fear that I might encounter an absence of discourse of learning, that I would find the dominant discourses to be those of work and performance, influenced by the national policy context. The first lesson I observed was orderly, organised, planned, controlled and the young people were purposefully engaged. However, I found no learning in this lesson, and in my fieldnotes I continued to record the question "where is the learning?"

while I observed other lessons. The question persisted throughout the period of my research, but I did find learning and discourses of learning in the schools, including one that reflected a rich view of learning. These findings are described in Chapter 6,7 & 8 and the implications for the study of education and for my own professional practice are considered in the final two chapters.

Chapter 2. Discourse – *organised statements which give expression to meanings*

This chapter introduces and explores the concept of discourse. There is a wide and disparate field of discourse studies and I want to locate this study within the relevant traditions of discourse analysis. To do this I shall explore what we mean when we refer to discourses and to examine the significant ideas about discourses and their analysis. The focus of this chapter is on how discourses do their work and on some approaches to the analysis of this work. In discussing this I intend to describe, in general terms, the value of discourse analysis to understanding learning and how learning is understood and enacted in schools.

Humans construct their realities through social interaction. Language plays a major part in the construction of meanings. The first part of this chapter explores the features of the language use that are significant for this study of discourses of learning. These include:

- social construction of discourses,
- the constitutive function of discourses,
- the privileging of some representations,
- power and discourses, and
- the influence of historical, political and social contexts.

This description of features of discourses is followed by a brief overview of discourse study and by an account of the relationship of this research to the overall picture.

The first feature to be explored is the social construction of discourses. The cohering idea across the broad field of discourse study is the idea that discourse is language in use. Discourse analysis research is the close study of

how language is used (Taylor, 2001b). This is a rather wide definition that draws on the ideas of social constructionists, that people understand the world through the experience of social interaction. This understanding is expressed, challenged and added to through further social interaction and especially through language. People construct knowledge and understandings through language. Language is itself socially constructed. It is both dynamic and plastic because it simultaneously influences and is itself subject to influence. Discourse arises from social action and discovering the social practice that creates or is influenced by the operation of discourses can bring an additional perspective to education research.

The second feature is that discourses have a constitutive function. Discourses, according to Foucault, are practices that 'systematically form the objects of which they speak', (quoted in Ball, 1990: 2). The key ideas here are that discourse is social action and that the consequence of the action is the formation of the object. The object is given meaning by the action of speaking or writing. In other words the discourse has a constitutive function in making meaning. Burr elaborates the relationship between meaning and language. A social constructionist, she points to a set of linguistic practices that work together to form a representation of a topic.

A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event (or person or class of persons), a particular way of representing it or them in a certain light (Burr, 1995: 48).

Burr sees discourse as constructed by a combination of linguistic features which carry a particular meaning. Other discourse analysts, such as Foucault and Gee, suggest that linguistic practices are supplemented by "other symbolic expressions, and 'artifacts', of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting..." (Gee, 1996: 131) to create the representation. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) have called these multimodal discourses, reflecting the move away from monomodality facilitated by new technologies and by changing practices in our social lives. The study of discourse, then, cannot only take

account of textual practice but must also look at other ways in which meanings are represented.

Some discourse traditions have focused specifically on the analysis of linguistic practices to understand how discourses do their work. In education this form of analysis has made a valuable contribution to understanding how different groups have been positioned, especially in classroom discourse. And while their contribution is valuable and provides some clues and understandings for my study, I am concerned with the outcome of the work done by such practices.

The third feature is that discourses privilege some representations over others, through classification and selection. Kress (1989) emphasises the active intervention of institutions in determining meanings and stresses the impact of these on those who are exposed to the discourses. He describes discourses as deliberate, systematic expressions.

Discourses are systematically organised sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution. Beyond that they define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say, and not to say. ... A discourse provides a set of possible statements about a given area, and organises and gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object or process is to be talked about. In that it provides descriptions, rules, permissions and possibilities of social and individual actions (Kress, 1989: 7).

Kress implies a deliberate intention by institutions to prescribe meanings through discourse. This approach ignores the dynamic and socially constructed nature of discourse. Kress appears to assume that power and authority, as conventionally defined, will always dominate. While it might dominate in some contexts this would be to ignore the inherent tensions between competing discourses, mediated through the contexts in which they are operating. Discourses are not created merely through speech and writing. They are also constituted through the actions of reading and listening, and through dialogue, discussion and dispute. It is an interactive process so discourses are never static. Although powerful forces may wish us to join in the derision of teachers, for example, the power may well be resisted,

challenged and shaped by how it is received and subsequently entered by other actors. Hicks (1996) reminds us that young people are also participants in discourse contexts, involving specific social usages of language from their earliest years. Official discourses always compete with everyday or 'folk' discourses, with the physical, historical, social and political aspects of the contexts within which they operate.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis states that our understandings of the world are derived from the linguistic categories given us by the language that we use. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) suggest that this is not true in its hard form: that we can perceive, see and think outside the categories prescribed by language. And they suggest that it is difficult to escape the idea that these categories "provide grooves for habituated thought" in a softer version of the hypothesis (p128). Perhaps we can see evidence of these grooves in a report by some Scottish researchers who noted that

... many children seemed blissfully unaware that there *was* any procedure at all in learning. They did what was required of them - or rather what they thought the teacher wanted: teachers teach, and as a result children learn (Nisbet & Shucksmith, 1984: 12).

The fourth feature of significance to this study is the connections between power and discourses. I am concerned with how discourses allow some ideas to have currency and proscribe others. The agencies or sources of power here are unclear. The role of teachers and others in lending authority to particular discourses is an issue for the study of learning discourses in schools.

Whatever the intention or accidental outcome the selection and de-selection of meanings is an important feature of discourses, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The fifth feature of discourse is the influence of the historical, political and social contexts in the creation and impact of discourses. The issue of power is connected to problems about the contexts of discourses. In the first place, there is the historical moment of discourse operation. As Gergen (1999: 62) points out, discourses are "carrying the past into the present to create the future". This is because words, the units of language in use, come with

associated meanings and contexts. They are not uttered in a void. This is true of schools, classrooms, teachers and other aspects of education. For example, the idea of the classroom and practice within it is persistent, despite significant technological advances from radio, film, tape-recorders, overhead projectors and television. Even computers may not alter basic human patterns and social practices within classrooms, as Cuban reminds us in his article *Computers meet classroom, classroom wins* (1993). There are persistent or conventional understandings of what a classroom is, what a teacher does, even what is to be learned, that are brought by all participants to the context of learning discourses. Each site of each speech act also holds its own history, which may influence the discourses and how they are understood and shared by the participants.

Contexts for discourses also have physical, political and social aspects and these may be deeply implicated in the historical context. The physical context may include the bounded nature of the discourse community such as the classroom or the school, both of which have clear physical boundaries designed to include some and exclude others¹. The notion of the bounded discourse community raises the important issue of the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others. This might be through physical access to the space in which discourse operates, or to other discourse communities, such as dialogue with authors through books and other publications, or through technological means, such as telephones, e-mail and the internet.

Discourses are also affected by the social and political contexts. Discursive influence has been evident in the politics of education and has influenced the lives of adults and young people in schools. For example, teachers in the 1980s and 1990s have been familiar with the discourse of 'derision' (Ball, 1993) by which powerful forces undermined public confidence in teachers and the public education system. My study takes account of the political

¹ The term 'discourse community' is often used to indicate a very narrowly defined community organised around textual discourse (Swales, 1990). I use the term 'discourse community' to include all those involved in the spoken, written and artefactual discourses, perhaps more akin to Lave & Wenger's idea of community of practice (1991).

aspects of the contexts and identifies competing discourses of learning within schools. Some discourse analysts suggest that identifying different discourses and other possible discourses is an important function of the study of discourse. I have joined with others to argue this, noting the cumulative and damaging effects of the discourses of deficit and failure, the discourse of standards, the discourse of compliance (Watkins, Best *et al*, 2000). We proposed counter discourses of honouring, human agency and of interaction, construction and learning. Gee (1996) goes further, arguing that learning about discourses is an emancipatory form of education that could help young people acquire, challenge, reconstruct and be aware of discourses to which they become exposed.

Burr explains that the discourses are constructed socially because they

are intimately connected to the way society is organised and run ... The discourses that form our identity are intimately tied to the structures and practices that are lived out in society from day to day, and it is in the interests of relatively powerful groups that some discourses and not others receive the stamp of 'truth' (Burr, 1995: 54-55).

Burr acknowledges the operation of power and the implied struggle for acceptability as 'truth' among competing discourses. Representations of structures and practices are connected to discourses. Ball points out that discourses operate by inclusion and exclusion, by classification and ordering and that they always are operating in conflict or tension with other discourses.

Discourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when and with what authority. Discourses embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations (Ball, 1990: 2).

Discourses are dynamic, never stable, constantly in tension with each other and subject to the impact of many aspects of the social setting in which they operate, including the presence of a researcher. Kress (1989) observes that text (spoken or written) is created in order to resolve differences, clashes of discourse. He would argue, for example, a school's teaching and learning policy is created to resolve the question of the form of discourse which

reflects the values and meanings allowed by the school and to try to silence others. This view ignores the ways in which policy and other documentation is created within an institution. Policy documents are often attempts to reconcile competing views and different voices can be heard within the same document. The significant point here is that discourses are always subject to competing influences.

The main features of discourse that are to be drawn on in this study are that discourses represent social acts, constituting representations of particular topics, including what can be said and excluding what cannot be said in constant tension between competing discourses. Discourses can only be understood within their context, as products of the historical, social, political and physical conditions that both influence and are influenced by them.

The study of discourses

There are several traditions in the study of discourse. It is therefore not surprising that discourse theory has drawn on and contributed to a variety of fields within the social sciences: for example, sociology, psychology, linguistics and education. Different traditions use a variety of methods to collect the discursive material for analysis and focus on discourses at the level of individual, cultural and community practices.

A reader for Open University students suggests the following traditions have emerged within discourse study: conversational analysis, discursive psychology, Foucauldian research, critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, ethnography of speaking and Bakhtinian research (Wetherell, 2001). Another categorisation of discourse study has suggested that there are three emphases. First are those studies concerned to trace genealogies of meanings, such as the work of Foucault in charting the development of the idea of mental illness and madness in our society. A second theme is concerned with identifying how people are framed by such terms. A third theme is concerned with identifying the processes of identifying how language functions to constitute these framings (Gergen, 1999). These traditions overlap, and have benefited from each other. This study draws on all three traditions, but is

most closely concerned with *identifying* the different discourses of learning, and not so much with tracing their genealogies, or how language operates to create power roles for people within schools. That would require a wider, longer study than is possible here.

Conclusion

My aim is to identify patterns in the use of language to show how these constitute meanings of learning in schools. Discourse and education sit together as an obvious focus of study. Learning and language are inter-related. This study is concerned with the discourses of learning, and how the meaning of learning is constructed through the social act of discourse. If, as Ball claims, 'Educational institutions control the access of individuals to various kinds of discourse' (1990: 3) then it is important to identify which discourses are current and available, and which are struggling and why.

Chapter 3: Discourse and Learning – *only doubt can make us see the possibility of alteration* (Brecht).

In this chapter I provide a rationale for exploring learning from a discursive perspective by drawing on the previous discussion that identified specific features of discourses. Discursive studies can help to “reveal how the nature and content of conceptualizations are socially shaped and situationally occasioned” (Edwards, 1993: 224). This chapter prepares the way for a preliminary description of the discourses and for an exploration of the research approach necessary to investigate discourses of learning in schools.

I am adopting the view that there are multiple discourses of learning. Because discourses construct meanings we can ask what different meanings of learning are in use in schools. We can explore how they are constructed through the use of discursive aspects of language (metaphors, overwording¹ etc). We can explore who constructs these discourses, in whose interest it is for one discourse to dominate another and how one meaning of learning obscures or impacts on others. We can investigate how the historical, social, political and community context affect discourses.

I want to relate four features of discourses to learning, drawn from the discussion in the previous chapter. They are

- how meanings are constituted through language,
- the contexts of discourses of learning,
- how power operate within discourses of learning and
- issues about access to discourses.

¹ ‘Overwording’ is the practice of saying more than necessary to convey meaning, perhaps through such practices as elaboration in subordinate clauses and repetition or near repetition of phrases (Fairclough, 1989).

The constitutive nature of discourses

There are meagre and rich views of learning and the richer views of learning promote more effective learning. If only meagre conceptions are present in the discourses then learners will not easily develop rich conceptions of learning and they will be less effective learners as a result. How members of the school community represent learning is therefore an important factor in students' and teachers' understandings of learning and their behaviours in school. My research explores the different ways in which young people and their teachers constitute learning.

Discourses are social acts. Discourses are representations of their subject. Discourses of learning depict learning in different ways. In schools they are enacted largely between combinations of teachers and their students and we should expect a range of discourses of learning within schools. Views of learning that emphasise individual processes are widespread and can make us forget that views of learning are themselves constructed through social processes.

The context for discourses of learning

Discourses operate at different levels and scales, at the level of the national education system, at a local or community level, at an organisational or whole-school level, at a group level – such as a class or friendship group that engages in learning activities together – and at an individual level. A study of discourses of learning has to consider the factors that influence different discourses to operate within different contexts. Within each level or between the levels discourses are always in tension with each other. These levels are briefly considered in turn to illustrate the possible impact on constituting discourses of learning.

a. the individual level.

Each individual has a unique combination of interactions with others that lead to different understandings. Individual young people, teachers, policy makers and researchers are likely to hold differing views about learning. Some of these will have been influenced by the assumptions, the everyday meanings of learning. From an early age, in Sweden for example, children believe that they learn by doing. By the age of four the pre-school child is “already on the way towards the traditional view of learning in schools acquiring knowledge by listening to the teacher” (Pramling, 1990: 13). Influences on these views appear to be a combination of experience and of adult talk and behaviour towards the learner.

Carol Dweck’s research (2000) has shown that many people (perhaps up to half) approach learning with a belief in the fixedness of their ability. They have an entity theory of intelligence, and this may lead them to a kind of helplessness in the face of difficulties with their learning. In contrast others hold an incremental view of their ability and welcome challenge and respond to difficulties with more effort. Those who hold an entity theory may be unaware of the possibility of seeing learning in different ways and therefore remain stuck in their helplessness (Dweck, 2000). She has demonstrated that it is possible to develop a learning rather than a performance orientation in learners.

Some young people see schools as primarily a social experience (Duffield *et al*, 2000), and this influences their views of school activities. Duffield and colleagues’ study revealed that they saw themselves as ‘pupils’ rather than learners. They prioritise relations to others (teachers, those who have left school) rather than the activities or even the outcomes of schooling. The study claimed that both young people and teachers operated within an absence of discourse of learning. The young people were most concerned with social relationships and their impact on behaviour.

Individuals’ beliefs about learning are influenced by interactions with others, developing views of ability and their experience in schools. It is

these beliefs about learning that an individual brings to discourse events, and these beliefs both influence discourses and are influenced by them.

b. classrooms

Classrooms are extremely complex because they are busy, public, unpredictable and multi-dimensional sites of simultaneous activity (Doyle, 1986). The implications for the study of discourses of learning are that learning is not necessarily the dominant activity in a classroom. I have already noted that young people may be more focused on the social than the learning dimensions of the classroom. Both teachers and students have an impact at classroom level. The classroom is an important site to study discourse of learning in schools because of this.

Teachers' linguistic practices have frequently been studied. For example, it has been noted (by Edwards and Westgate, 1994) that teachers often use standard language and they talk, frequently, to large numbers of young people. Interaction with the students often takes the form of IRE (initiation, response and evaluation). The teacher asks a question, usually a closed question requiring a correct response. A student responds. The teacher makes an evaluative comment about the response, such as "Correct" or "Good try, but not quite right". Much of the discursive impact in the classroom is mediated through the IRE structure and through the presentation of the classroom activities. Australian researchers have been establishing a link between the classroom environment created by teachers and young people's conceptions of learning (Campbell *et al*, 2001). When the teacher focused on active student engagement, students responded with a constructivist approach to their learning. But with traditional expository teaching methods they responded by focusing on memory and reproduction. Marshall found that the way teachers framed lessons and presented tasks influenced their students' understanding. Those who emphasised task completion created a work orientation in contrast to those who presented the activity as about learning and thinking (Marshall, 1994). Other research projects have confirmed the

influence of the teacher and examined ways in which children's understanding has been enriched through activities that were presented differently, required reflective dialogue or other collaborative practices (see for example: Fisher, 1993; Pramling, 1990; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1983). These studies suggest that the way in which teachers frame classroom activities has an impact upon students' understanding of their learning.

The use of computers that exploits the possibilities of interactive and design programmes and of communications with those beyond the classroom boundaries may also extend the language of learning. It is unlikely to happen unless computers go beyond use as glorified information resources, calculators and word processors.

c. school context

Another context for studying discourses of learning is the organisational level. We have very little information about discourses of learning at this level. One study indicated that teachers, as a group, do not use a very rich discourse of learning (Morgan & Morris, 1999). Another study has shown that their views of learning can have an impact at an organisational level; a study of discourses of learning difficulties found that teachers' discourse in two schools differed about the significance of ability and potential in young people's learning. The teachers promoted contrasting ways of organising support for youngsters with learning difficulties as a result (Skidmore, 1999).

Recent interest in learning organisations has suggested that discourse may be significant at this level. The development of teachers' discourses of learning may have contributed to the capacity to effect improvements in two case study schools, described in the *Improving Schools Project* of Gray *et al* (1999).

They had developed ways of being more specific about precisely how they wished to improve pupils' learning, were able to draw on colleagues' experiences to formulate strategies and had found ways of helping

colleagues to evaluate and learn from their own and other teachers' classroom experiences (p146).

d. external contexts

At the national level, the political agenda in the UK is very focused on performance outcomes. Governments, of course, have a political agenda, usually to do with appearing successful to enhance their chances of retaining power. Some policies may be self-defeating, because of the focus on targets and the fear in schools of the consequences of failing to reach them. A research review suggests that a focus on performance often inhibits performance, but a focus on learning enhances learning and may also promote improved performance (Watkins, 2001).

There are other influences in the school's external context. The assessment and accountability systems are rooted in a historical belief about educational success depending on the failure of others (failure of individual students at 11+, for example, or, more recently, the failing of schools and teachers as a result of OFSTED inspections). Another influence is the prolonged derision of teachers, educational research and the educational establishment, especially by those with right-wing tendencies. These influences are all present in the school's external context and play a part in influencing discourse production and use in schools.

Issues of privilege and power in discourses

A further question is how power operates to privilege some discourses over others. This chapter has identified several factors that seem to be important within classrooms and the school:

- the students' prior discursive experience,
- the teachers' prior discursive experience,
- the teachers' presentation of classroom activities,

- teachers' talk about learning,
- classroom factors that support or marginalise different learning discourses,
- the dominant discourse in the school's environment, and
- factors that support or marginalise the dominant learning discourses in the school's environment

Together these factors produce something that might best be described as discourse 'soup'. Discourses never completely triumph, never completely shut out other discourses. They are always subject to processes that privilege some over others. The processes by which a particular discourse or particular discourses become dominant are not clear. This study attempts to identify sources of discourse influence on discourses of learning in schools.

Access to discourses

The study of discourse communities has raised questions about access into the community. But 'access' may not be the right word to use here. Familiarity or fluency may be words that better describe how individuals become conversant with alternative discourses. Extrapolating from research into discourses the key processes appear to include the following:

- the presence of a variety of discourses in the school's activities,
- opportunities to become familiar with the discourses through talk,
- the presence of discourse guides, such as teachers or others already familiar with the discourses,
- teachers who frame activities within the discourses,
- engaging in activities related to the discourses.

In the learning communities studied by Lave and Wenger, the novices gained entry to the communities through learning *to* talk in the appropriate discourse, and did not just learn *from* talk (1991).

I have referred above to some studies that report on classroom practices that promote articulation about learning through reflection. The example from Sweden is significant because it concerns very young children, who were asked to reflect on their learning, its forms and purposes and developed meta-learning capacities (Pramling, 1990). Quicke and Winter have done the same with low achieving pupils (1994). Such practices are best set within the context of a rich school discourse. A focus on learning by the teachers, grounded in interaction with the students, can help this process.

Literature in the field

There is very little literature linking discourses and learning. This state of affairs arises from the historical origins of research into learning, which is closely linked to the general view of learning and in particular its supposed dependence on teaching. Searches of both the library catalogues and the main electronic databases, (BEI and ERIC²) revealed a few small-scale studies. Key words such as discourse, discursive, metaphor and key authors were used. Those that threw light on discourses of learning in the classroom have been referred to.

In the final section of this chapter I explain the lack of a rich understanding of learning discourses in current literature. There is a body of research about language use in classrooms, mostly focused on teachers, who were the intended audience for this work, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. There is another body of research into children's talk about learning, its processes, optimal conditions and so forth. Reviewing the small body of literature, I came to see that researchers have focused on four themes: on teaching without connecting it to any elaborated

² British Education Index and Education Research Information Centre.

conception of learning, on adults' learning, on conditions of learning and on individuals rather than interactions. We consider each of these in turn.

The policy context since the late 1980s has been designed to influence what can be done most immediately and therefore has been intending to influence teaching. Indeed teachers have been subjected to an attempt to redefine what it means to be a teacher through the publications of standards for teachers (TTA, 1998) and closer control of initial teacher education and an attempt to change the culture of teaching through performance management. OFSTED inspections in school have focused on teaching with considerations about learning limited until the 1999 framework to the observation of parts of lessons mostly to gauge the impact of the teaching. Clearly teaching influences learning, but too much of an emphasis on teaching can ignore the influence of other factors. It ignores the evidence that people often learn without being taught, that children learn from their families (especially their parents/carers), both in and out of school and that many other factors influence learning: context, activities, beliefs and so on (Watkins *et al*, 1996).

The second feature of the literature is that research into learning and what learners know and believe about learning is mostly related to adults. We have some studies about different beliefs or understandings about learning (for example, Marton *et al*, 1993). These are considered in the next chapter. Adults are usually considered to be easier research subjects, more articulate, more able to be objective about their thoughts, less willing to please the interviewer or researcher.

The third strand is that what we do have about learning is limited in its scope – that is, it is more interested in the implications of what young people say than about their understanding of learning – learning is not problematised. As suggested earlier in this chapter, this is partly because learning is seen as an individual and internal activity, and therefore not perceived as subject to social acts and to the creation of discourse. Two

studies exemplify the way in which researchers have concentrated on the implications of what young people say. The first is a series of essays by Rudduck and colleagues (1996) from a longitudinal study, called *School Improvement: What can pupils tell us?* This study is concerned with conditions of learning. A second investigation was based on interviews with more than 100 teachers and more than 200 pupils in ten South Wales schools (Morgan & Morris, 1999). The researchers focus on what these two groups said about teaching and learning, in response to common questions. Pupils were asked

Do you *learn more* in some lessons than others? (If the answer is YES) What makes *the difference* between lessons where you learn a lot and those where you don't learn much? (p13. Emphasis in original)

The pupils were invited to see better learning in terms of quantity. The teachers' responses were directly compared with the pupils, although they had been asked a slightly but significantly different question where 'better' learning relates to speed:

To what do you attribute *differences in the rate at which pupils learn* – that some pupils learn better than others? (p13. Emphasis in original)

The concept of 'rate' implies a combination of quantity and time. The researchers referred to 'better' learning in discussing the responses of both groups, although how they or their interviewees understood 'better' was not elaborated. The authors do not discuss the difference between these descriptions of good learning (quantity for pupils and rate for teachers) and this indicates an acceptance of common-sense views of learning. They do not see the need to explore what young people or their teachers mean by learning or learning better. Not surprisingly, however, the responses indicate that there was a range of different meanings to the question about the amount they learned, and not all answers related to amount, but also included method, memorisation and so forth. Thus both the Rudduck study and the South Wales research do not consider what it means to learn, to be effective learners or to improve their learning processes.

Finally, the long tradition of exploring the psychology of learning has focused on individual learners, and especially on what goes on in individual heads. This tradition does not pay much attention to social aspects of learning or how discourses may influence individual conceptions of learning.

The focus on teaching, the lack of pupil voice, and the thin conceptions of learning that have been briefly described may explain the difficulties schools appear to have in building their capacity for improvement. In Gray *et al*'s longitudinal study of secondary schools referred to above, the researchers noted how only a small number appear to be able to build capacity to improve effectively at the 'learning level' (1999). It was a focus on learning that marked out the two schools that were successful in promoting improvement. These schools had gone beyond tactical and strategic thinking to develop a capacity to change. They involved teachers in dialogue amongst themselves and with their students about teaching and learning.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have linked the concepts of discourse and learning. I have drawn on the literature in this area to consider some issues in discourses of learning. The first three chapters have emphasised that discourses are the result of social construction of meaning through language, that they constitute meanings, and are formed in contexts that are significant for the dominance of some discourses over others, and for the familiarising of participants with the different discourses. These three chapters have prepared the ground for a preliminary description of three possible discourses of learning and for a description of my approach to the research.

Chapter 4: Discourses of Learning – *work, performance and learning*

The purpose of this chapter is to describe discourses of learning from the literature and from my own analysis as a starting point against which the research will be tested and compared. This chapter identifies some discourses of learning, considers how each positions the learner and their characteristics, teaching characteristics, teaching and learning activities and the meanings of the concept of learning. Each discourse is examined for its metaphors, implicit theory, assumptions and connections with the education contexts. In this chapter I also identify locations where these aspects of the discourses might be found in a school.

In creating these descriptions of the discourses I am influenced by three sources: the context in which I live, my experiences as a researcher and as a teacher. It is not possible for any of us to escape the influence of 'folk theories' about pedagogy, as Bruner (1996) has described them, which are embedded in our culture. One of the most common beliefs is that of teaching by showing (for example apprenticeship), which implies that you learn by watching. A second is that people learn by being told. More sophisticated versions are that people learn through making meaning or creating knowledge.

My own views have been formed by 21 years in secondary schools. As a teacher I was involved in busy classrooms, in the public and immediate nature of the activities and interactions. As a researcher, I have been in a position to observe such activities and had the leisure to reflect on the meaning, causes and possible outcomes of what I observed. As a researcher I speak to teachers and their students about learning, making connections with readings and my own exploration with colleagues into the inter-related concepts of effective learning and meta-learning. The concern with language and with artefacts of discourses has accompanied

these studies and they come together now in mapping the discourses of learning.

For this study three discourses have been identified from the research and some variations have been noted.

- learning as work
- learning as performance
- a richer discourse of learning.

The use of the word 'as' needs some explanation. I am approaching discourse study from a co-constructionist perspective. Participants in the discourse of learning as work are sharing in the construction of the meaning of learning 'as' work, and similarly with the description of learning 'as' performance. The third discourse is described in different terms, which is discussed later.

The discourses overlap in any one school. Individuals draw on them in different circumstances and for different purposes. At times, in many schools there may be discourse about work or performance or achievement. In some schools discourses may be in competition, perhaps relating to different audiences or different circumstances.

Discourses reflect views about learning, such as the folk pedagogies mentioned above. Here I will briefly describe the perceptions of learning that the three discourses draw on. I have categorised these according to meagreness or richness according to my understanding of how far they draw on ideas of effective learning. Effective here, means the kind of learning required for young people in schools at the start of the twenty-first century. They will require the ability to learn in different contexts and throughout their lives.

One study found the following everyday ideas about learning when they analysed mature students' views of learning:

- getting more knowledge,
- memorising and reproducing,
- applying facts or procedures,
- understanding,
- seeing something in a different way, and
- changing as a person (Marton, *et al*, 1993).

The list begins with a mechanical view of learning: taking in or consuming more information. Learning to recite your 'times tables' is an example of the second meaning of memorising and reproducing. Applying those tables to help solve mathematical problems involves the third meaning of applying facts or procedures. The list moves on to include seeing the learning as making meaning, interpreting events and constructing knowledge or understanding. Some researchers describe this as a move from a surface to a deep understanding of learning (see for example Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). I prefer to categorise these as meagre or rich, to draw on the idea of complexity in understanding learning.

A dominant perception of the teaching and learning is as transmission-reception. Knowledge is something to be passed or transmitted from the teacher (or other sources such as books and, more recently, the internet) to the learner. I have characterised this as a meagre perception of learning. Three features of this perception are relevant for considering its impact on discourses: its epistemological stance, the implied teacher-learner relationship and an individualist view of the learner.

The epistemological stance of this discourse is positivist and quantitative. I noted the unexamined assumption by students, teachers and researchers that more learning is better in Chapter 3 (Morgan & Morris, 1999). The quantity is the amount of knowledge the young person absorbs. Knowledge, in the meagre view of learning, is out there, discoverable, and

fixed. The learner's task is to somehow internalise this knowledge. The cultural critic, Postman, describes it in this way:

Knowledge is presented [in schools] as a commodity to be acquired, never as a human struggle to understand, to overcome falsity, to stumble towards the truth (Postman, 1996: 116).

Another writer echoes the idea of information as a commodity, something to trade with:

We assume these days that information is like money: you can't have too much of it. But in fact, too much information is at least as bad as too little: it masks ignorance, buries important facts, and incapacitates minds by overwhelming the critical capacity for brilliant selectivity that characterizes the human brain (Ehrenfeld, 1999: 36).

The second feature follows from this and concerns the relationship between the learner and the teacher. The relationship is hierarchical as the teacher controls and is responsible for what the student learns. The central role of the teacher is reflected in the attention to teaching that has been the focus of so much policy recently. The pupil takes a respondent and more passive role in this asymmetrical relationship (Fisher, 1993). This accords with Cuban's observation that learning is commonly seen as a passive activity of listening in the face of teaching as telling (Cuban, 1993). Behavioural psychology reinforced this notion: teachers stimulate, learners respond. OFSTED used the word 'response' in their second handbook in this way¹ (OFSTED, 1995). Much of the early discourse study of classroom interactions focused on teacher performance and teacher-led interaction. As was noted in the previous chapter, one of the most common patterns is IRE (initiation, response and evaluation) (Edwards & Westgate, 1994). Questions, the initiation, are usually designed to check what information the student has acquired – the response.

The third feature is the individualism of the learner, in this perception of learning. Learning is seen to occur inside one's head. It is not seen as a relational activity, beyond requiring receptiveness to others. These ideas

¹ For example: "Teaching is the major factor contributing to pupils' attainment, progress and response" (OFSTED, 1995: 71).

have been challenged by many, especially for those teaching young children, including by the publication of Vygotsky's research into the zone of proximal development in the 1970s. We should note that this work focused on the teacher's role, and not in the richness others could add that to young people's learning: fellow students, parents and others out of school. Despite these alternative views, the forms of assessment generally in use in schools continue to reinforce the idea that learning is an individual process.

This meagre perception of learning is still very dominant in schools, among both teachers and students, and with the general public. It is closely associated with the first three of Marton and colleagues' meaning of learning: getting more knowledge, memorising and reproducing, and applying facts or procedures (1993).

A richer, more complex perception of learning focuses more on the learners' construction of meaning. This is under-pinned by an epistemological position that emphasises knowledge as constructed from experiences through variation and adding to previous knowledge. The role of the teacher is to assist the learner, by acting as a resource for strategies, challenge and information. The relationship is less asymmetrical, for the learner can often lead the way. In the more complex versions of this perception, meanings are co-constructed, through dialogue. Learning in this perception is concerned with understanding, seeing something in a different way and changing as a person (Marton *et al*, 1993).

Working with colleagues, I have come to see that the most effective learners are those who are active and collaborative in constructing their own understanding, for example through dialogue. They can take responsibility for their own learning and they have an awareness of themselves as learners. They monitor and adapt their own learning through an awareness of their purposes, strategies, emotions, contexts and

have a capacity for meta-learning, to learn about learning (see Watkins *et al*, 1996).

In these brief descriptions of perceptions of learning drawn from the research, I have emphasised the most meagre and the richest views in order to point up important differences that emerge in considering the discourses of learning. I now present my preliminary description of dominant discourses of learning. These descriptions were put together to prepare for the collection of data in schools and for examining them in the voice of the participants. As the research literature provided no descriptions in preparing to gather data in schools I found it necessary to draw up some frameworks or initial descriptions to identify the main features of the discourses, where they might be found, their linguistic aspects and possible sources of influence.

a. Learning as work

The word 'work' is ubiquitous in classrooms, describing any purposeful activity. "Get on with your work", "your work is improving", "here's your homework", "could try harder", "this is good work". The language and metaphors of work and by extension of the workplace permeate classrooms in schools (Marshall, 1988). They are also evident in research based on classroom observation, such as the noting of 'time on task' (see for example Rutter *et al*, 1979). It seems impossible to talk in schools about learning, progress or achievement without drawing on this discourse. In 1997 when I interviewed some Y7 students about their perceptions of learning, I intended to avoid any reference to 'work', but found on listening to the tapes that, despite this conscious attempt, I had resorted to using the term, especially when clarifying my questions for the young people (Lodge, 1997).

This discourse reflects the industrial origins of modern schooling and links with the metaphor of the school as factory (Schlechty, 1990). In the industrial period, the school had an important function to prepare young people for a life of labour. Obedience, hard work, diligence, following

instructions, good timekeeping and a basic knowledge about the world were considered necessary qualities to instil in young people through school. The meaning and experience of paid work has changed since the industrial period, but schools continue to invoke the need to develop these qualities in their students as preparation for the adult world of paid work.

The purpose of work is to complete tasks, usually resulting in a concrete product also called work, (as in the phrase "I handed in my work to the teacher"). A teacher of design and technology reported an interesting rejection of this view. She said that students "are reluctant to re-do work, claiming that they have learnt from it and there is no point" (Stacey, 2001: 37). This stance causes problems for teachers who need the product in order to make an evaluation of it.

In this discourse effort plays an important role. Learning and activity are associated from an early age for all children. Very young children understand that they learn by doing (Pramling, 1990). In this discourse, work and the associated effort are assumed to be unpleasant. Effort is particularly associated with writing. Thus children will say "Great lesson Miss, we didn't do any work," when they have had a lively lesson involving discussion, but no writing². Thus activities that require labour and have a product, such as writing, are seen as work. "We learn when the teacher talks, and then we do the writing," said a Y7 student from Bradford (Klein, 2001). Learners in school are constructed as labourers, hands, and workers. Teachers can find themselves spending a great deal of time requiring their compliance through 'work'. Morgan and Morris (1999: 42) comment on how often they heard the students report the instruction "just get on with it" from teachers in the classroom. We can begin to understand the importance attached to the attendance of students

² Teachers also fall into this trap. Michael Barber tells the story about his first history teaching post when he saw a boy apparently gazing out of the window. "What are you doing?" "Thinking, Sir". "Well, stop that and get on with your work."

in school. Their attendance is the only way to monitor their labour. Absence implies the opposite of work and some phrases to describe truancy, playing truant or hooky in some areas, use the word 'play'.

This discourse opposes work to play and to fun. Progression through childhood sees a gradual reduction in the time allowed for play and an increase in serious activities, described in school as work. This is reflected in the pressure that their schooling places upon them. Kohn (1997) points out that simplistic binary thinking often serves to obscure complexity, and that the dichotomy between work and play excludes a third alternative - learning.

Work is what fills the hours of lessons spent in the classroom at the direction of the teacher. The term 'master' implies a position of power and was common for (male) teachers until recently. Manke (1997) has pointed out that power is relational, and has challenged the idea that teachers must retain it for learning to take place. Woods (1990) has suggested that teachers and pupils negotiate an agreement or pact in relation to the work of the classroom: pupils will conform to the minimum demands in exchange for minimum disruption. This pact will be challenged where demands for more work are made, perhaps in response to the external context of the school for higher performance levels.

Endurance is associated with unpleasant activities. This discourse implies that work is unpleasant (and indeed this may be the experience of the students) and this means that the teacher may feel obliged to make classroom work as pleasant as possible. They may feel that they have to motivate young people to endure the tasks set in the classroom and for homework. Teachers have to ensure that students work by giving them motivation or by a system of threats and rewards. The discourse represents the learner as dependent on the teacher. A Canadian study indicated that teachers' discourse implies motivation as something you either do or do not have. This study connected the school's evaluative discourse to young

people's beliefs about motivation through a shared language (Lapadat, 2000).

The discourse of work emphasises the importance of a product, in keeping with its industrial origins. A different meaning of learning, making connections, extending understanding, may not require any product - as the design and technology students spotted. However, in a system where evidence of learning is required, young people must produce evidence of learning. Hence the emphasis on products, and tests (paper and pencil tests beloved by conservatives) and a link to the second discourse, of performance.

The teacher, in this discourse, is seen as requiring skills and competencies often phrased in managerial language (see for example *TTA Standards*, 1998). Subject leaders are expected to "help staff to achieve constructive working relationships with pupils" (p11), to deploy resources and "ensure that there is a safe working and learning environment". Learning is represented as an outcome of good teaching. Reference is made to both teaching and learning objectives, but in different sections indicating some tensions in the presentation of this discourse. One reference to effective learning in the context of ICT singles out information retrieval. This is a version of transmission-reception approach: knowledge is to be retrieved. The relationship between teachers and students is characterised by control by the teacher of lesson objectives, content, structure and of the evaluation of students. Teachers are expected to "establish and maintain a purposeful working atmosphere" and to "use teaching methods which sustain the momentum of pupils' work"(p7). This last requirement is then elaborated through fourteen separate descriptors, many of which have multiple subsidiary clauses. This overwording, or swamping indicates an attempt to persuade where no agreement can be assumed (Fairclough, 1989). Newly qualified teachers must learn to operate within this discourse to gain entry to the profession.

Concrete images are often used to describe the curriculum in the discourse of work. There is a 'foundation' stage in the National Curriculum. The curriculum is a body of knowledge to be delivered. The TTA standards (1998) refer to “sound learning”. There are references to basics. Learning is a sequential activity, like constructing a building and the curriculum is framed accordingly. This discourse does not problematise the notion of basics. Learning is viewed as an outcome of this labour, absorbed in a linear fashion, evidenced by the product.

This discourse, drawn from the commercial world, also refers to preparation for adult life, especially work. As such it fits nicely into the policy discourse of education as serving economic purposes, as this statement from a DfEE policy document demonstrates:

Learning is the key to prosperity - for each of us as well as for the nation as a whole. ... To achieve stable and sustained growth, we will need a well-educated, well-equipped and adaptable labour force (DfEE, 1998: 7).

Good examination grades are required in order to find employment after school.

Parents are not present in this discourse. They serve only to act as surrogate taskmasters, supporting the teachers in getting the pupils working. Their influence on or aspirations for their offspring are not taken into account. It is not only parents who are ignored in this discourse. The idea of learning out of school is excluded, not seen as work, because it is associated with pleasant activities, socialising, choice and the pursuit of interests in clubs and other relationships. The differences between the learning contexts is summarised in table 4.1.

School learning	Home learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• shaped by curriculum;• bounded by sanctions;• timetabled;• contrived problems;• restricted language;• limited conversations;	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• shaped by interest;• spontaneous;• flexible;• natural problems;• everyday language;• extended conversations;

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• special resources – limited access;• recognition of achievement in approved areas;• horizontal age group;• distant relationship with adults;• pupil role;• accounts for little variation in academic achievement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• natural resources – unlimited access;• recognition of achievement in many areas;• vertical age group;• close relationship with adults;• multiple roles;• accounts for much variation in academic achievement.
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Table 4.1: School and home as contexts for learning: (Hannon, 1993, cited in MacBeath, 2000: 141)

These two lists in table 4.1 point to important differences between learning in and out of school. Learning in schools, in this conception, requires a great deal of control and discipline to be exercised by the teachers, as can be seen from the words bounded, restricted, limited. On the other hand learning out of school is referred to in terms of flexibility, variety, naturalness and spontaneity. Commenting on these lists MacBeath points out "The current structure of schools 'teaches' above all the pupil role. Teachers teach and pupils learn and it rarely happens the other way round" (2000: 142). The discourse of control reinforces the role differences. It defines teaching (controlling, limiting, and restricting). Learning is in teachers' control, controlled through the definition of the curriculum, through recognition of approved achievements, the arrangements for learning (timetabling, contrived problems, special resources) and through sanctions. The parallels with Dickensian factory work are strong when seen from this perspective: work requirements are defined by the factory master, who controls the workers through timetables, physical arrangements, separate and distant relationships and sanctions. Teachers, in my experience, often refer to the need to develop good work habits as a justification for requiring certain behaviours at school. The factory view of school is of course anachronistic when considered against contemporary

working conditions (flexible working patterns, flatter hierarchies, teamwork and more autonomy).

The discourse of learning as work is increasingly being underpinned by government policies for raising standards. The link for teachers with managerialist ideas has already been noted. Kohn is especially critical of the extent to which workplace language has informed practice in schools.

The emphasis is on results, on turning out a product, on quantifying improvement on a fixed series of measures such as sales volume or return on investment. The extent to which this mentality has taken hold in discussions about education is the extent to which our schools are in trouble (Kohn, 1997).

Other metaphors employed in this discourse of work draw on the world of enterprise and commerce: value added, stakeholder, enterprise, standards and benchmarks.

We would expect that the main location for this discourse is likely to be where the work is focused - in the classroom.

Variations in the discourse of learning as work

i. Learning as reaching targets – an emerging discourse

This discourse appears to be emerging, but may only be a temporary response to government policy. Here the metaphor of reaching or achieving targets has come to mean learning. In this discourse there is little of the students' voices, it reflects the policy-dominated view of targets and achievement which has been promoted in the last two years. Language about production targets has been familiar in the business world for some time.

This discourse may be a variation of one discussed earlier, emerging from a very mechanistic and instrumental view. If targets are set, young people encouraged to meet them, then learning is regarded as having taken place. Reporting on the response of some students to Personal Learning Plans, which included targets, one research project reported that:

Students regard a target as a task for completion and may or may not achieve it; and may or may not learn from it. In general terms, students have not yet considered the nature of learning nor identified the learning skills that could be practised, and they did not understand that learning is both active and reflective (Bullock & Wikeley, 2000: 6).

ii. learning as treatment

The best example of 'learning as a treatment' is a Linguaphone advertisement that shows three stages: you listen, you repeat, you understand. Underneath is the headline: 'This is how - in just three months - you could be speaking the new language of your choice confidently without really noticing that you've learnt it...' In the text there is a reference to natural absorption of the difficult aspects of grammar, verbs, expressions and special sentence construction. This advert has some similarity to the treatments for hair loss, including a reference to science. We might note in passing that at a national level, learning, especially lifelong learning, is regarded as the treatment for alarming national economic competitive performance.

Kohn points out that where the discourse of work prevails there is a strong sense of having to "take your medicine". Taking your medicine has two meanings: a treatment for something that is wrong, but also a punishment for wrong-doing. Teachers immersed in this approach try to avoid all mistakes and avoid punishment, rather than seeing them as an opportunity to reflect on learning (Kohn, 1997).

iii. learning as banking or acquisition of knowledge:

Connected to the discourse of work, and overlapping with it is the discourse that uses the metaphor of 'banking', which is how Freire (1990) describes it to illustrate its poverty. Teachers make deposits and require their pupils to act like tellers, enabling withdrawals of the deposits at a later date. The expression 'interest in learning' can take on two meanings in this discourse: engagement and profit. The successful learner is the one who can accumulate most stocks of learning. The successful teacher is the one who can deposit most information. Another metaphor is of the

learner as a receptacle, learning as taking in knowledge, skills and understanding.

b. The Discourse of Performance

This discourse also draws on meagre views of learning, sharing many of the assumptions of the discourse of work: the epistemological stance that knowledge is separate, 'out there' and needs to be brought into the learner's head, the separate and hierarchical relationship between the learner and teacher, the central focus on the teachers and the individualism of the learner, which is emphasised by the examination system. However it differs in an important way: the purpose of all this activity is performance, which will be subjected to public evaluation.

There is a strong emphasis on doing more, doing it better, doing it right, getting more (knowledge, information, skills), getting more in your head (memorisation) and getting it right (accuracy). The purposes of learning are instrumental: necessary for the next stage, or for examination performance or for a possible future job.

Beliefs about objective testing and the possibilities of catarogic results influence this discourse. They are played out every summer when improvements in the GCSE and A Level scores are reported. The dominance of this evaluative talk has been recent. In the 1980s the Records of Achievement discourse could also be emancipatory in contrast to the modernist, catarogic discourse of the 'pen and paper' testing regime introduced during the 1990s (Broadfoot, 1998). Both discourses continue to be used, serving differing and not necessarily contradictory policy objectives. However the modernist discourse is dominant and, Broadfoot suggests, reinforces traditional concepts of both teaching and learning.

This discourse may include a focus on competition, reflecting a belief that competition will motivate young people to want to do better than their fellow students. Some young people hold beliefs about themselves that suggest that in some circumstances they would be motivated by

competition, so long as that meant they were seen to do better than others. These learners are part of a group who have been described as having a performance orientation, in contrast to a group with a learning orientation, summarised in table 4.2.

learning orientation	performance orientation
belief that effort leads to success	belief that ability leads to success
belief in one's ability to improve and learn	concern to be judged as able, to perform
preference for challenging tasks	satisfaction from doing better than others
satisfaction from success at difficult tasks	emphasis on competition and public evaluation
problem-solving and self-instruction when engaged in tasks	helplessness: negative self-evaluation when task is difficult

Table 4.2. Motivational Patterns in Learners (Watkins, *et al.*, 1996)

Learners’ beliefs are very powerful in their learning. Carol Dweck, has used the phrase "self theories" to describe these beliefs about ourselves as learners (Dweck, 2000). People are not fixed in all circumstances in these groupings, but because they are founded on learners’ beliefs about learning and about themselves they need to be challenged if they are to move from a performance to a learning orientation.

Another feature of this discourse is that performance is linked to a particular age or time period. Young people are expected to perform at certain levels at certain ages, and this explain the idea of 'catch-up' classes and the practice of assessments taking place at particular times rather than when the young person is ready for it.

This discourse is likely to be heard in talk among teachers who are individually and collectively subjected to judgements about the performance of young people and in classrooms and among students when they are preparing for assessment.

c. A rich discourse of learning

The discourse of learning stands in contrast to the other two, drawing as it does on a rich and more complex perspective of learning. To create this description I have drawn on work on effective learning that I have undertaken with colleagues (see Watkins *et al*, 1996). It places the learner at the centre of the process. This discourse replaces simplistic ideas about hard work and performance with those about how to learn more effectively, the strategies and approaches and skills that can be helpful. Processes and outcomes of those processes are closely connected in this discourse.

At the individual level one of the most significant processes is to make connections between what has been learned in different contexts. This might be in or out of school, with future needs or with other learning within school. A second process is to engage with others in learning, especially through talk. When I spoke to Annie, in 1997, she was just able to get beyond quantity views of learning to one that reflected the idea that learning with others could be valuable process (see opening quotation). Reflecting on one's own learning is included in this discourse, including the ability to be articulate about learning strategies. This discourse also includes the idea of reflection on the impact of contexts, such as learning in social groups, in silence, at home, in a library, from the internet. It could also include references to further learning goals. Ideas about the processes of learning provide more guidance than 'hard work' or mere activity. The significant contribution of reflection adds a richer dimension, implying some self-judgement. The ability to learn about learning links all of these processes.

The outcomes of learning, in this discourse, are not primarily for evaluation by others. This discourse reflects the view that learning results in positive emotions, including affiliation to learning. The discourse reflects a sense of connection with others and with previous knowledge,

and a sense of greater complexity. The meta-level of learning is present here in the outcomes for the learner.

The discourse in the classroom reflects relationships between teachers and learners that are not defined by hierarchy but by learning needs.

Knowledge, including knowledge about learning, is seen as created through social processes involving teachers and students. Connections between learning contexts feature. The roles of teacher and learner can be shared and exchanged between people.

At the school level, the discourse refers to learning communities.

Teachers and students share language about learning. The processes of school self-review are seen as learning opportunities for the learning at a systems level. There is an emphasis on the meta levels of learning.

Schools promote learning that has some of the characteristics of learning out of schools (see Table 4.1), and promote conditions and activities that engage young people.

I have been unable to find a word to summarise this discourse as the words 'work' and 'performance' do for the other discourses. This is partly because the discourse of learning is not dominant and therefore not clearly definable. I was not sure that I would find any strong evidence of this discourse in schools. In addition, as it reflects an emerging view of learning, its shape and most distinctive features are not yet fully evident. In addition, it reflects a more complex and rich view of learning that is difficult to sum up in single words. Perhaps this will change in time and a suitable word will emerge.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described three 'ideal types' of discourses of learning from the literature and from my own analysis. They were used as a preliminary starting point to test and compare the research findings. These descriptions helped me to understand what I might look for in

schools. The next chapter describes the research approach and methods I used to find evidence of the discourses in schools.

Chapter 5: Investigating Discourses of Learning – *here be dragons*

This chapter provides a rationale for the approach used to collect and analyse data, explores some of the issues and problems in researching and describes the difficulties and successes I encountered.

My approach to the research has been considerably influenced by three aspects of my previous experience of researching and writing about learning in schools. First, my research approach is influenced by my previous research activities. An earlier EdD assignment considered how articulate Y7 children were about their learning (Lodge, 1997). This was a very small project, based on observation of a lesson, followed by a group and then individual interviews with four students at a large comprehensive school in East London. This was not the first time I had used group and individual interviews and these experiences provided a kind of apprenticeship for gathering data in this project.

Some of my confidence in interviewing young people and adults in secondary schools comes from many years of association with them in schools. Twenty-one years of daily contact with young people means I have developed a confidence in speaking with students and teachers about the experience of schools, but a confidence which requires awareness to ensure that I don't fall into too many assumptions based on experiences of the past. I am less confident in approaching primary schools, where my experience has been as a visitor: most frequently either as a parent or to recruit students to secondary school.

The third strand is my work with colleagues on learning. Over some years we have been developing our thinking on learning, the value of meta-learning and the meaning of effective learning. I have explained my preferred discourse of learning (see Chapter 4) and refer to it again here because my view of learning has informed my approach to the research reported here.

The purpose of my research was to collect data to map the discourses of learning in schools. The metaphor of mapping points to some issues in this research. There is the question of scale: should my overview be broad-brush pictures or more detailed elaboration? Then there is the question of how to identify the topographical features, the mountains, the rivers, and the urban sprawls of discourses of learning. There are no accepted norms about studying discourse as there are for cartography. Choices have to be made about the principle features and organising principles of the discourses. The mapping metaphor also emphasises the concern with representation rather than measurement, with relationships and juxtapositions rather than quantities. Discourses shift and change more quickly than landscape. Much of the territory will have the legend for uncharted territories “here be dragons”. The metaphor of mapping invites us to consider cartographers as constructivists, looking to produce reliable tools for travellers, sources of information for students. A neophyte traveller may feel entirely in the territory of the dragons. An approach to this area must be undertaken with trepidation, with a good deal of daunt.

Ontological and epistemological position

There are three features of discourses that need to be considered in designing the collection of data to do with discourses.

The most significant feature is that discourses are socially constructed phenomena. This means that they exist in so far as two or more people are engaged in dialogue, or as far as one person (or group) is trying to impose their view of the world on another. Second, discourses are to a great extent determined by their context, in this case the school. Third, discourses are constantly evolving. These three features of discourses have particular implications for research methodology: the researcher must work in context, have access to the social interactions of the students and teachers and others in the school, and adopt a flexible approach to research. A fourth feature of discourses, how they do their work, is more relevant to a discussion of the analysis of the data.

These three features have implications for the research approach. To capture the contextual, social and shifting dimensions of discourses I needed to adopt methods broadly derived from ethnographic research, especially observation, as well as interviews and documentary analysis. I needed to collect data from interactions in three arenas: between students, between teachers and between students and teachers. As the relationships differ, data from all three are required to map the discourses in use. Table 5.1 indicates the methods used to collect data in those three areas. It should be noted that each of the three sets of social interactions was approached in three ways.

	student < > student	student < > teacher	teacher < > teacher
Lesson observations	√	√	
Interviews	√	√	√
Other observations	√	√	√
Documentary evidence			√

Table 5.1 Methods of data collection

It should be noted that the student interviews were group interviews and that I was the teacher participant in the interviews (see below). Each of the four methods will be described below, together with issues that arose in collecting data.

Choice of schools

In some schools there may be very little rich discourse of learning: discourses of work or performance may dominate and exclude other discourses. In some schools I have known there has been an absence of talk about learning. Because I wanted to hear the richer discourses of learning I deliberately chose schools where it was likely that rich discourses of learning could be discerned, either on the recommendation of colleagues or by personal knowledge. These schools had all been involved in programmes that focused on learning for two years or more. As my purpose was to describe in general terms the discourses operating in

schools, not to generalise from this research too much I was not constrained to research in typical schools.

I collected data in four schools – two primary, two secondary, in the Midlands, in inner and outer London. I wanted to collect from a range of settings having found schools that had development programmes on learning. Brief descriptions of these schools are included in Appendix 1. Arrangements for observations and interviews were largely made to suit the school, my only request was for a range of lessons and age groups. The range of interviews and observations are described in Appendix 2.

Research context

The schools were approached through the headteacher, and I introduced myself as a research student and former secondary school headteacher. As most of the research was undertaken during an extremely busy period for all schools, due to the large number of central government initiatives and during the term when public tests and examinations take place, I was anxious to offer credentials that would make the process efficient. The consequences for the data collected of taking this stance are considered below when discussing relationships in interviewing.

It was a time of change in the policy context, a general election taking place during the period when fieldwork was undertaken. Since starting the fieldwork I have co-authored a book on supporting learning in secondary schools. The research also provided material for this book although none was specifically collected for that purpose.

Data Collection

Each of the methods in table 5.1 is now considered in turn.

Observations

Observation was used both for its own advantages and as a shared experience on which to draw when interviewing the young people as discussed below. I was

privileged to observe a range of lessons in all schools (20 lessons, see Appendix 2), to attend a staff development session, and to be able to note many visual aspects of the playgrounds, staffrooms and classrooms.

The richest source of observational data came from the classrooms where lessons were taking place. It seems natural to focus on the teacher when observing lessons and it required concentration to include observations of the activities and conversations of the youngsters. For a while it was disconcerting to note how much activity and talk in classrooms appears to have very little connection with learning. I called this 'noise'. It often had to do with behaviour, practical arrangements or some hiatus in proceedings. I have not discounted the 'noise' and it is significant how frequently my fieldnotes say, "where is the learning?" Sometimes this referred to a suspicion that very little learning was taking place, but it was also a reflection of the frustration of a researcher trying to observe the processes of learning.

My intention was to record the discursive narrative and the main incidents in the lesson. I noted the physical features of the classroom, to help me remember later: arrangement of desks, boys' and girls' seating, computers, doors, window, posters and so forth. I noted the key features of the lessons as they occurred, such as teacher directions and the student activities. I recorded something about the overall behaviour, especially noise levels, and any significant events, such as interruptions, shared jokes or events I did not understand. I recorded my own reactions, such as feeling uncomfortable when a lesson began to go badly. I especially noted key phrases: the use of the word 'work', warnings about time, process words, praise. Sometimes I would observe an individual or group of students who appeared very engaged, or not engaged for several minutes. This would often result in questions such as "what skills or understanding do they appear to be getting from this activity?" and "are these kids excellent at learning how little they can do?" Here is a brief example:

Incident with a large boy. Stuck. Told to get dictionary. Gets one and interrupts ST [support teacher]. She tells him to look up words again. He puts dictionary back. ST: why? I need help to understand words. Can't understand words in dictionary. ST catches my eye. What are you to do? ...

Another student asks, do I have to do everything? All 18 [questions]? T: Yes. You'd better speed up. (Fieldnotes, Sec 2 Y10 English).

These notes were annotated soon after the observation with notes questioning the learning and to indicate that the students were required to work faster. Occasionally such notes provided me with further questions for later conversations with the teachers. When the lesson was followed by a group interview I often over-wrote a second set of notes referring to any points they made. In this way I had a textual record of some of the lesson. I captured some of the discourse between teachers and students and between students as it took place in the classroom. Classrooms are busy, public, complex places where many events are happening simultaneously. I was attempting to capture the discourses of learning for later analysis. The observations also allowed students and I to ground some of the discussion in shared experiences, when these were followed by group interviews.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with small groups of students, immediately following observations of a lesson in which they were involved. I left the choice of students and teachers up to the school, asking only for a 'range' and leaving this to their interpretation. The teachers were mostly interviewed individually, at times convenient to them. In this section the approach taken to interviewing generally in this project is considered, followed by an exploration of the issues involved.

Interviews are "a special form of conversation" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997: 113), initiated by the researcher to produce information relevant to the research project (Watts & Ebbutt, 1987). It is the interview's interactive characteristic that I wished to exploit to collect data relating to discourses. One-to-one interviews are not conventionally seen as interactive: the researcher takes an objective stance, the "subject" is a "vessel of answers", "the subject is epistemologically passive, not engaged in the production of knowledge" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997: 117). Holstein and Gubrium have pointed out that no interview situation is neutral and without impact on the participants and any attempt to minimise

interviewer effects will fail. They suggest that the interviewer take advantage of the inevitable influence of the researcher on the interview situation, rather than seek to minimise their impact. This active role is explored further below when considering relationships in interviewing, but here it should be noted that this construction of interviewing requires self-consciousness by the researcher at all stages of the process. Sample question schedules are included in Appendix 3. I used a schedule as an aide-memoire. I guided the conversations according to the responses of the young people to the questions about the lesson. Conversations developed from specific references to the lesson.

Group interviews have particular significance for research into discourses because they are set up to produce interaction between the participants (Denscombe, 1995). Group interviews were used in this project because of "the interview situation's ability to incite the production of meanings" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997: 122). The following table compares features of traditional interviewing drawn from Oakley (1981) with this more active form of interviewing (table 5.2).

Traditional Interviewing (from Oakley, 1981)	Active Interviewing
Mechanical instrument of data collection	Emergent, organic, naturalistic conversation
Special form of conversation involving question and answer	Natural conversation on specific topic selected by researcher
Interviewee has a passive role to answer questions	Interviewee is active, tentative, involved, making connections
Interviewer establishes rapport, maintains control and ask questions	Interviewer is active, involved, challenging, reframing, making connections

Table 5.2 Comparison between traditional and active interviewing.

Relationships in interviewing

I presented myself as a teacher-researcher in the interviews with both students and teachers. This inevitably informed both the collection and analysis of the data. I have already indicated that the interactional nature of interviewing was

central to my research design. However eschewing the traditional format of the interview does not remove the need to consider relationships within interviews, not least because participants bring their own expectations. It is likely to be the traditional image, saturated as we are by many media in this model. The group interviews with the students somewhat interrupted this traditional picture, and allowed participants to construct the interview more as a conversation than as a researcher's fishing trip. Group interviews have the merit of avoiding the focus of all attention being on individuals, which young people can find unnerving.

To shift my conversants from a conventional view of our respective roles in interviewing meant being explicit about the interactional nature of what I intended. As the one-to-one interview is the dominant social research method (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997) I used phrases such as "I'd like to talk with you about learning", or "I want to have a conversation about learning," and to take an active, challenging and interpretative role. By presenting myself as a researcher with experience as a teacher I was able to be openly partisan and challenging at times, and to involve myself in the session, sometimes with a narrative of my own (Denscombe, 1995). One Y3 girl thanked me for being her teacher at the end of one group interview¹.

Taking up the stance of a teacher-researcher allowed those participating in conversations to draw on an assumed set of shared understandings about schools and classrooms, about teachers' and students' behaviours, about the ways in which schools and classrooms operate and so forth. On the other hand I thereby denied myself the stance of a naïve outsider. This made it harder for all participants to notice and to explore shared assumptions, although I could do that about particular school practices. I am less familiar with practice in primary schools, and was able to ask naïve questions about the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies.

¹ On another occasion I found myself slipping into the teacher's role by stepping between two boys who were fighting in the playground in a secondary school. I am not sure who was more surprised, me that I had taken up the role of teacher (leaving aside my visitor status) or them that they responded to me as a teacher when they had never seen me before.

Interviewing young people

There are a number of issues involved in interviewing young people, especially primary school students. There is an extensive literature about this, although much of it comes from the tradition of promoting the rights of young people, often calling upon the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, giving young people a voice (for example Davie & Galloway, 1996). These writers have highlighted how unusual it can be in schools for young people to be asked for their views. While some children find it strange to talk with an adult, I was not primarily asking them for their views or opinions. I wanted to hear them talk with fellow students and with me about learning.

Reluctance to interview young people sometimes arises from a distrust of their ability to be objective or logical or from a fear that they will be overawed by the interview situation. These concerns are found in literature about interviewing children, which frequently gives advice about how to prevent children from simply pleasing the interviewer, from giving vent to emotional or vindictive views about school and teachers or from trying to impress their fellow students. This approach assumes a traditional approach of discovering what young people think (the epistemologically passive model referred to above) about some aspect of school.

My approach was to accept that all these things might indeed play a part, but to accept them as a part of the school context that reflected the processes of discourse operation and therefore data appropriate for analysis. An active role by the interviewer allowed me to challenge, check and reframe. As the interviews followed a lesson observation, I was able to draw on concrete examples to do this. The group interview encouraged the discourses current between young people. The young people often spoke for each other, (indicated by overlapping, interruption and prompting) or added to and extended the contributions of others, or corrected or challenged each other². Occasionally one person or view dominated, but this was not the general pattern. Again, this does

not invalidate the data, rather it should be seen as reflecting the processes of discourse operation. Generally the young people were able to sustain their contribution within the 20-minute conversation. Only one session appeared to be unproductive, but this occurred at the end of a very hot morning, with Y1 students. Luke contributed by providing an amusing rejection of my attempts to involve him:

CML How did you get your new words? Where did they come from?

Luke They come from my brain! [others laugh]

CML And did you see pictures in your head when you were writing them?

Luke No, I just saw, um, a tree! [more laughter]

Jack We had a kind of sheet where the words were there to help. And we got the words from there.

Luke He had a sheep to help him and I had a tree to help me!

CML You're not helping me though (Pri 2 Y1).

The literature raises other issues about interviewing children suggesting that each of these may have an effect on the data collected:

- group relations, including:
 - size of group
 - age of participants
 - gender
 - ethnicity
 - physical arrangements
- context - place, time
- language

² Examples of these can be found in Chapter 6, 7 & 8.

- what the researcher brings to the situation (Davie & Galloway, 1996; Denscombe, 1995; Lewis, 1992; Mauthner, 1997; Watt & Ebbutt, 1987)

I would argue that these impact on how comfortable the young people feel about engaging in the conversation and therefore need attention. They also reflect the influences on discourses in schools. I tried to make things comfortable for the young people and to note any relevant influences on the discussions.

A more significant issue for me was an awareness through previous research that young people are often not very articulate about learning. To become a more effective learner, a more reflective learner, young people need to develop the language of learning³. To facilitate talk about learning I followed Mauthner's suggestion of focusing on their own experiences, encouraging their narratives (1997) by using again a technique that combines observation with interviewing. This technique is designed to motivate the interviewees to ground their responses in experiences shared with the interviewer (Cooper, 1993). In this project I adapted the technique by interviewing small groups of students instead of individuals. It was successful in getting rich data: students referred to the lessons we had just experienced, clarifying incidents, or drawing out examples as I did. I was able to challenge or prompt them by reference to the lesson.

Interviewing in groups

Group interviews are now frequently used in research. A common view is that they are effective in the following:

- to establish consensus beliefs
- to develop depth and breadth of data in combination with other collection methods

³ A teacher recently related how he had changed from a didactic, performance approach to teaching maths in his secondary school, to one where he invited the students to discuss the maths they were involved in learning. The students found it very hard and he was ready to abandon the experiment, but a colleague pointed out to him that the students did not know how to talk about maths and he needed to help them learn this.

- as triangulation for data collected in other ways
- to enhance reliability and validity (Lewis, 1992), and
- to provide a naturalistic setting (Krueger, 1994).

None of these purposes directly coincided with mine. The data were not collected to complement or triangulate other data or to claim validity and reliability. I was not looking for consensus, rather I wanted to see both similarity and difference in the discourses of the participants. The main purpose was to provide a social, interactive setting for discourse operation. It could not be described as natural for the participants. The classrooms in which the conversations took place may have been familiar but the activity was not. Young people do not sit in empty classrooms with two or three other students and consider questions put to them about learning by a teacher-researcher. They do not normally talk about such things in small groups, if at all. For the purposes of my research it was the *talk* I wished to record, not the social relationships. I wanted to record the action of the discourses itself and the way in which individuals and groups responded to the discourses.

Group interviews can promote some of the features of the active interview, allowing all participants to see their roles in relation to the construction of the knowledge being discussed. The participants are more easily able to lose the perception of what is required of them as “vessels of answers” and to explore their understanding in relation to a number of positions, opinions and influences. It also allowed me to meet a larger number of students in a short time.

While there are advantages to group interviews, there are some difficulties including the managing the role of the interviewer: judging the degree of direction, monitoring the involvement of all participants, spotting when a challenge or prompt might be productive, managing the recording, speedily establishing a positive relationship with several youngsters while doing all the above. These are skills that I have developed as a teacher and so was generally able to manage these practical issues. Group interviews also present some

practical issues for handling, transcribing and analysing the data collected, especially identifying participants. However, tracking the individual contributions was not of primary significance and with some practice and a great deal of repetition it was only occasionally a problem.

Recording the data

Most interviews were tape recorded, and relevant extracts were transcribed. Despite some practical difficulties with sound quality I recorded some classroom conversations, but not all, as it sometimes felt intrusive and disruptive to approach students with a tape recorder. As a consequence the data from these conversations were recorded in my fieldnotes, which did not provide the richness of verbatim transcriptions. These conversations did contribute to a more general awareness of the classroom discourses.

I kept extensive fieldnotes, not just during the interviews and lesson observations, but also during all my time at the school. I also kept reflective journals – one related to the writing of the thesis and the other to the research processes. These enabled me to record the large number of different issues raised in the research, and to reflect on them later while keeping a record of the processes I had been through.

Documentary data

Documentary evidence was collected to provide information about discourses between teachers. It often represents the officially sanctioned discourse. It was therefore valuable for its role in illuminating the school context of discourses of learning. The scale of the study did not allow for a full discourse analysis of written textual documentation. Instead I accepted the documentary evidence that was offered as an extension of the spoken discourse and used these texts as a less significant source of evidence. This is justified by my central concern with young people's discourse. They do not usually have access to such documentation, although they may be influenced by it. An interesting exception to this is the booklet called *Language and Thinking in Learning* which teachers prepared for students at one of the secondary schools. However, in conversation

with the students it became clear that they only referred to it under direction from the teachers in the classroom.

It can be seen from this account that the data collected represent a range of possible discourse events and are drawn from the socially constructed, contextual and unfixed dimensions of discourses of learning.

Analysis of Data

The volume of data collected required analysis and compression in order to describe the discourses of learning. The transcription of the tape-recorded data was a time-consuming process. Transcription involves selection, especially as I decided not to analyse the 'noise', that is where there was an absence of discourses of learning. Transcription renders into continuous, linear text that which is spoken and requires choices about non-textual aspects such as tone of voice, pauses, interruptions and so forth. As I was not engaging in close and detailed textual analysis I tried to render the speech in a form that was intelligible to a reader and noted some of the significant other features that helped convey what was being said. (For a note on transcriptions see Appendix 4). These kinds of choices mean that transcription is itself a form of analysis. As a further compression I then went through each transcript and identified the main learning discourse references.

My main purpose was to map the discourses in use, so I went on to identify evidence of each of the three main discourses at work from the observations, interviews and documentary sources. This process became iterative, as I explored these individual chunks of conversation, comparing them with each other and the theoretical typology I had developed from the literature (see Chapter 4) and with the data from the observations and documentary sources. This search for patterns and discontinuities is at the heart of discourse analysis. After some experimentation I decided to use a framework drawn from a research review that I had co-authored for further analysis of two of the discourses. The framework had been developed as an organising structure for helping people reflecting and reviewing their learning. The elements of this framework are:

- *purposes* in learning,
- *strategies* used in learning,
- *effects* of learning,
- *feelings* in learning, and
- *context* of learning (Watkins *et al*, 1996).

This categorisation worked for the two discourses that reflect meagre views of learning, but did not work so well for the richer discourse of learning. The explanation for this may be that the discourses are drawn from two modes of thought: the narrative and more formal, paradigmatic mode (Bruner, 1985). The discourses of work and performance are categorical, hierarchical, linked to structural and mechanistic ideas of learning. The weight or credibility in this discourse is derived from the position of the teller, often the teacher or sometimes the learner through a process of ventriloquism (as in “Ms H says ...”). The rich discourse of learning is relational, draws on narratives and is post-structural, organic. It derives its authority from the stories of people’s personal and lived experiences while the more meagre discourses are not drawn from personal experiences. In identifying these two modes of thought, Bruner pointed out that they are both versions of the world, but they work in different ways that have little relation to each other (1985).

When I tried to analyse the richer discourse according to the above framework the elements were so entwined, so inter-related that description became too messy. I was able to make a more coherent description using the characteristics of effective learning that we had developed in a research review (Watkins *et al*, 1996) and added one (connectivity) that emerged from the analysis process as especially significant:

- connectivity
- learner responsibility

- collaborative learning
- activity in learning and
- meta-learning, learning about learning (Watkins *et al*, 1996).

These two frameworks provided a way to organise and present the essential elements of the different discourses. The data was classified in these categories and this enabled a meaningful picture to emerge without too much contradiction. Some overlap between the discourses of work and performance were evident, and it required a further analysis of the data to realise that they drew on similar meagre views of learning, but the effect or work of the discourses could be differentiated. This is more fully discussed in the following three chapters, which describe the discourses in turn.

There are four issues regarding this analysis of the discourse. The first is the decision to use previously defined categories to analyse the data. In testing the ideal types drawn from the literature and described in Chapter 4 a good fit did emerge and raises some interesting implications for learning in schools. It is not my claim that the typology presented in this thesis is the only possible one for categorising discourses of learning. An alternative approach would have been to build the analysis from themes emerging from the data. In rejecting this approach I made it much less likely that different categories would emerge and also prevented a discussion of the merits of different ways of categorising discourses.

The second trap was the temptation to second-guess what someone meant. I tried to avoid this by focusing on the words and their discursive effect, rather than speculating about meanings. Third it is impossible to reach a point when the data are exhausted, when the analysis is complete (Taylor, 2001b). I made no attempt to explore inter-school or inter-age differences in the discourses – the fourth issue. Such analysis would almost certainly produce valuable further insights and would require more systematic selection of schools and young people for interviews. It would be a valuable extension of this study. As with any research my analysis is open to challenge and my description of the

approach and methods I employed to collect the data is intended to make such a challenge possible.

Conclusion

I am not claiming that the collection and analysis of the data presented here allows me to generalise about discourses in all schools. Rather, I have attempted to present a justification for arriving at the conclusion relating to these schools and for some implications of looking at discourses of learning in other schools. The methods of data collection and analysis draw on the co-constructivist approach that brought me to consider discourses of learning. I have indicated some of the issues and limitations that derive from my approach to the collection and analysis of data. The descriptions of the three discourses as I found them in the schools are presented in the next three chapters and the implications of the findings for learning in schools are then discussed in Chapter 9.

Chapter 6. The Discourse of Performance – *getting all the ticks*

In this and the next two chapters I describe the three discourses as I found them operating in the four schools. The descriptions are built from what the students and teachers said in their conversations, supported by evidence from observations and the documentary materials. I have highlighted, in particular, where competing discourses have emerged, as they highlight particular issues with which people in schools are currently struggling. The dominance of the performance discourse, especially the experience of teachers who are held accountable, raises questions about whether performance in tests prevents or suppresses learning. In the discourses of work and performance the students find the implications of the underpinning views of learning dictate contexts that are unsympathetic to them. Such contexts may prevent effective learning taking place. In the richer discourse, unless teachers and students can talk in a shared language, not a simplistic one, the students show that some well-meant efforts will bear no fruit.

Each chapter considers a different discourse. They are then considered together in a discussion of the implications of what has been found. There is no attempt to summarise the findings according to the different schools, or to do more than draw preliminary impressions about the differences between teachers and students or between primary and secondary school students or in different discourse sites.

The young people operated more clearly than the teachers in the three separate discourses. Their teachers' use of the discourses tended to fall into two major categories: a richer and a more meagre discourse of learning. This more meagre discourse roughly equates with the two discourses of work and performance identified in the young people's talk. Teachers moved between the two discourses of performance and work, sometimes in the same sentence as in this example from a Y4 class teacher:

But the children, they know, they know right from the beginning - I mean, my class – I say they have to work hard, behave well, I expect them to be the best

class in the school, I expect them to work really hard, and I just push them (Pri 2 T2).

The discourses of performance and work are considered next two chapters. Each chapter starts by considering the discourses under the following headings:

- purpose,
- effects,
- strategies,
- emotions and feelings, and
- context.

The Discourse of Learning as Performance

Learning as performance is concerned especially, but not exclusively, with performance in tests and examinations. It also refers to the performance of skills and the reproduction of memorised material. The focus is on the outcome and is highly pragmatic. The outcome or product of learning in this discourse is usually concrete, often a piece of writing. It is produced in order to be evaluated. The processes of learning are less emphasised than content in this discourse.

Performance is seen as individualistic, encouraged by assessment practices for students and by a policy emphasis on the accountability of teachers and schools.

Purpose

In the performance discourse the purposes of learning are described in a number of ways. There is a strong emphasis on doing better, doing right. Connected to this, there is theme of getting more, getting more in your head and getting it right. Young people also saw the purposes of learning as instrumental and sequential: necessary for the next school or life stage and built up from stage to stage, both in individual lessons and in their learning over time. These overlapping purposes are now considered in more detail.

In a Y11 science lesson that I observed the students were preparing coursework for their GCSE examination and focused on improving their grades. They had to demonstrate identified skills: planning, obtaining information, analysis and evaluation. This meant they were rewriting sections following guidance from their teacher. They were very clear about this purpose. Both teacher and students understood that they must focus on improving performance in GCSE examinations. This is performance without learning, except learning to perform better at GCSE science.

A good learner, according to a Y4 boy, completes their work, which can then be evaluated with ticks and marks:

Yes, like you're doing the work, and get all the ticks, and they've memorised all the words, and they've known all the sums, their times tables. [...]. If you work hard you probably get more marks (Pri 1 Y4).

He links performance with the second discourse, of work. This often happens (as we have already noted with a teacher).

Direct references to testing, such as GCSEs, were not very frequent. No student referred to SATs, and there was only one reference to the 11+. Although there was a lack of direct reference, there is still a strong influence of national testing on youngsters' discourse as well as their other behaviours. Y9 students made the following typical suggestions when asked why they were learning about conversion graphs:

Gavin It's about GCSE work, start doing GCSE work, getting us used to it.

Aya We didn't do any graphs in Year 8 or Year 9.

George It might come up in later life.

Susan You might want to be a maths teacher (Sec 2 Y9).

They suggest that it will be needed for the next stage, "GCSE work". GCSE is used here as a descriptor of an activity, rather than as a reference to the test itself. The quotation is interesting because in it the young people move from GCSE work to a slightly longer-term view of their learning, implying they have not yet

covered something important. The possibility that they might need the graphs later in life, perhaps even for a job is not convincingly expressed ('might' indicates only possibility, not probability).

In this discourse, the students expressed the idea that knowledge is built sequentially. Like the Y9 students, these children in Y1 believed that their learning was preparing them for the next stage:

Alice So we know how to spell them so when we go into Year 2 we wont have -

Kate - trouble -

Alice - any trouble doing the words.

Daniel Because when you go to Year 2 and the teacher might say, "I thought you knew how to spell words" (Pri 1 Y1).

Daniel is concerned about getting it and getting it right, here meaning how to spell, in the judgement of his future teacher.

One group of Y4 children could only provide a very short-term purpose for learning about insects and their habitats:

Usha I think we are learning this because we heard that we are going to go on a trip to a nature area and so I think that's why they're teaching us more all about habitats because we might be doing lots there (Pri 1 Y4).

The Y4 girls in this group (Pri 1) repeatedly referred to locking up information in their heads, keeping it in, and keeping it safe. For them memorisation and learning was synonymous. Other young people suggested that learning means taking as much in as possible (quantity) in order to reproduce it later, often for a test. A Y6 girl agreed with her friend that good learners listen and "don't muck around because you might have a test on that soon." "Same as Sally, but like, take it all in" which, she elaborated, meant "Like, say you've got a test, remember it all" (Pri 1).

The youngsters had a belief that learning is ordered sequentially, both within each lesson and overall. For example when they discussed what the teacher did

to help them learn in the previous lesson a typical comment from a secondary student was:

Aya He told us every single stage, stage by stage what we had to do (Sec 2 Y9).

Teachers apparently encourage this view, reinforcing the quantitative view of learning, and suggesting that it needs to be taken in a piece at a time. A Y10 girl talked about her science teacher.

Mr M says something about this. He says a good learner knows he can only learn one or two things at a time and take them in fully, but a bad learner who tries to learn a hundred things at once and doesn't take each thing in (Sec 1 Y10).

Teachers did not talk in this way with me. This may be because I had positioned myself as a teacher and an emphasis on performance is taken for granted between teachers.

Effects in learning as performance

The effects of learning in this discourse are closely related to purposes. For some good learning meant they would gain welcome public recognition:

I think that when it's tomorrow I will be star of the day (Pri 1 Y1).

Good performance might lead to a feeling of pride at being promoted. In the following example Akim refers to his promotion into a higher ability group, named after geometric shapes:

I feel proud of myself because I'm achieving something and the most thing I am proud of is when we're doing maths, because I'm in square in the maths group and before I was in circle and a few months ago I moved up to square and soon I hope to move up to triangle (Pri 2 Y3/4).

These older students wanted their teachers to know that they could 'do' (perform) what had been asked of them:

Gill But when you do understand everything you just want to do more. So I think the more lessons that are good the more work you do...

Darren It's like in maths. You learn how to do a new sum -

Gill - equation -

Darren - an equation or something.

Gill Yeah.

Darren “Ma’am put some more on the board, I know how to do it now. Keep bringing them my way.”

Gill You feel you always want to show off with the teacher. “Ma’am is this right?” when you know it’s right.

CML You want people to see?

All Yeah (Sec 2 Y10).

For all the young people quoted here, good learning meant a good performance and recognition of having done well. The effects of learning in this discourse are all in the public domain. This may be uncomfortable and disabling for students afraid of poor performance, as will be discussed later in the section on feelings.

Only one child (Pri 1 Y4) saw good learning as performing better than others. This competitive aspect was not otherwise evident in their discourse. Dweck suggests that a desire to compete and to be seen to perform better than others plays a major part in what she termed a “performance orientation” (Dweck, 2000). There is also a strong everyday belief that competition motivates learners. Perhaps it was not evident in these schools because the schools have played it down, or because the young people do not share this belief. Individual competition may also be masked by the public policy discourse that stresses competition between schools, but not between individual students. The emphasis is on all young people improving on the performance of previous cohorts but the overall orientation is maintained.

Strategies in learning as performance

In the performance discourse strategies for learning mostly drew on a meagre view of learning and from the transmission-reception model of teaching and

learning. One Y10 boy said of listening, “that’s how I learn,” and “I learn because people tell me”¹.

Many young people indicated a similar dependence on teachers in many of the conversations. They suggested that important skills for good learners included listening, paying attention, not being distracted or distracting (“not fiddling with anyone’s hair,” Pri 1, Y1). A few referred to learning by being shown, or by demonstration. They expected teachers and other students to model procedures for them to follow, especially in maths/numeracy. I observed some children following such procedures when they got stuck. Practising is a similar strategy for learning, especially in PE lessons, but also in other subjects. A strong theme was a belief that you need to work things out yourself in order to learn.

Memorising is another feature of this discourse and memorising strategies were referred to extensively by the Y4 group who talked about getting things in their heads. In the following example we can detect the influence of ‘Accelerated Learning’ in the school (see Smith, 1996):

Usha Sometimes what I do is when I forget it I look through it again and then I kind of memorise it in a kind of rhyme just to keep it in my head.

CML Can you give me an example of that?

Usha Like I read this book called *Matilda*² and there's this class and they say how to spell difficulty and there's - Mrs D, -

All [joining in] - Mrs I Mrs F,F,I, Mrs C, Mrs U, Mrs L, T, Y (Pri 1 Y4).

Y10 students associated good learning with memorising. One group proposed the following characteristics of a good learner: listening (“because to learn you

¹ This boy (John, Sec 1 Y10) later said he was a “boffin” and did not mind being identified as a member of this social group, even if this meant he was socially isolated from other as a result. In talking about learning, however, he offered few strategies, could only say that he waits for the teacher to explain when he got stuck. I had observed just this behaviour in the lesson. He appeared to operate almost completely within the reception view of learning.

² She is referring to *Matilda* by Roald Dahl.

need to listen”), good organisation so you will know where to go back to for revision and:

You need a good memory, so if you have a good memory, whatever the teacher tells you, you know, you can keep it in your head and it stays there (Sec 2, Y10).

The science teacher also linked memory to performance in GCSE by saying to the Y11 students reviewing their 'mock' examination papers, "It's just a matter of remembering all this" (Sec 1).

Feelings about learning

It is hard to separate feelings within this discourse from the purposes, effects and strategies already described. Some are clear, such as pride in performance, a desire to show off the successful performance (“keep ‘em coming, Ma’am”) as already mentioned.

Fear of failure was evident for others, especially when the emphasis on performance came from parent and teacher. Linda is a high-achieving student who is “frightened to death” and will be “really ashamed” if she does not achieve the expected grades:

Linda My teacher frightened me to death because I’d got all top marks, and “A”s and stuff and he was going on about how it was expected that I would get all “A”s and “A stars” in my GCSEs and he was saying, you know, we’ll all be disappointed if you don’t get that sort of mark. And it was really frightening. And then my Dad, cos my Dad, he’s kind of like that as well it was like, because my teacher had said it he expected it as well and it just frightened me to death ... [inaudible].

CML So it’s not made you feel good?

Linda No. I mean it did please me that I got good marks and everything but because now I know that’s what is expected -

Jane - if you don’t get it -

Linda - if I don’t get it I’ll be really ashamed of myself (Sec 1 Y10).

Linda describes herself as being frightened three times. She is afraid of not meeting public expectations, and will then be “really ashamed”. The role of public evaluation in learning produces such feelings. Dweck's research has

shown that the fear of failure can prevent people with a performance orientation taking risks or trying alternative strategies when they encounter difficulties (2000). The dominance of the performance discourse can operate in schools in this way.

Context of their learning

The young people appeared to have taken on a great deal of the performance discourse. However in relation to the context of their learning they expressed some concerns that indicated some discordance.

The learning in schools mostly takes place in classrooms where the dominant mode is "sitting down and writing". Some Y6 students described what they liked about a special lesson intended to develop an approach to constructing an argument.

John We were like all discussing –

CML - more than you usually do. And do you like doing that?

Stan Yes, I like it.

CML And John?

John Yes, I like it. Discussing is better than sitting down and writing.

CML Is a lot of schoolwork sitting down and writing?

John [Slight laugh] Yeah.

Stan Lots of it's listening to understand what you're doing. But most of it's sitting down and writing (Pri 1 Y6).

A secondary school teacher used the same phrase when he described his visit to the school on interview: in every lesson including practical ones, "they were sitting down and writing". The phrase recurred in a discussion about the difference between ordinary learning and a Science Day. Y9 students suggested that one difference was "we're not sitting at tables and writing. You can talk and that" (Sec 2 Y9). And it was poignantly described by two Y10 students who wanted lessons "when you can get up and do things". They disliked the bleak

experience of “just me (one) and my work”. “Yes, just you, a pen and a piece of paper” (Sec 2 Y10).

The young people preferred a learning environment that allowed social interaction and in many cases they gave learning-related reasons for this preference, as will be discussed later. “Some teachers think that silence is a good thing when it’s not,” explained a Y10 boy, adding, “There will always be subjects or parts of subjects that you don’t enjoy. That’s the worst thing about it. And you’re not going to add to it by making them sit in silence.” (Sec 1 Y10). The students prefer situations that are more like everyday interactions: not physically constrained, or isolating or focused on writing. They are arguing for contexts that have some of the features of out of school learning: these might include flexibility, variety, naturalness and spontaneity (see Chapter 4, table 4.1).

The students are drawing on experiences that have exposed them to richer learning contexts in which dialogue, responsibility and activity were significant. Their experience of good learning on these occasions did not depend on the teacher. This is in contrast to the conditions implied by the transmission-reception view of teaching and learning. I observed teachers expending a good deal of energy and time in imposing and controlling these conditions in the classroom. I also observed resistance.

This discourse was very evident in the discussions with students, and to a more limited extent with their teachers. It might be surprising that it was not much evident in classroom discourse. The reasons for this will be considered later, but perhaps one reason is that classrooms are busy and immediate places. Teachers and students are engaged in negotiating a very complex set of interactions. The immediate concern is to do with task so that the second discourse, of work, dominates the classroom.

Teachers and performativity

In conversations with the teachers I did not hear much directly about the performance of the young people. It was evident in classrooms, especially for the oldest students who were preparing for GCSE. Teachers on the other hand,

referred to the pressure on school performance, especially in SATs and GCSEs. The pressure reflects the policy concern with the effectiveness and improvement of schools and does not focus on the performance of individual students. In evaluating the performance of the school judgements are made about teachers' individual and collective professional competence and quality. Teachers themselves, in the UK, are now subject to Performance Management. Their work is reviewed, evaluated and further targets are set related the performance of their students in public assessments. The pressure on the students is a refraction of these pressures on the teachers.

The government's discourse of raising standards is firmly within the performance discourse. The teachers in the four schools were experiencing some conflicts and difficulties where their views of learning were put into direct contact with this agenda. Each of the four schools demonstrated a slightly different response to this tension.

The headteacher of Primary 1 expressed the strongest identification with the government's agenda.

Ms L I personally do not think that the sort of central stuff coming out from the government is poor quality. I think it's very, very good solid educational stuff. The literacy strategy, the numeracy strategy, the ICT, they are very, very good quality they're very high quality – period (Pri 1 HT).

But the assertion of the quality of the initiatives is strangely articulated. In the first place it is presented as a negative, as if Ms L is contradicting a prevailing view ("I do not think ... is poor quality"). Second it is presented as a personal statement. Third it contains considerable overwording and overstressing (Fairclough, 1989). "Very, very" is repeated, as is "quality". And the "period" which completed this endorsement suggests that she will brook no disagreement. This undercurrent of doubt was given more substance in a subsequent discussion about risks. The headteacher reported that she had been inspired to take risks by hearing Tom Bentley³. She spoke in terms of being

³ Director of DEMOS, a public policy think-tank, and author of *Learning Beyond the Classroom* (1998).

“subversive”, avoiding being “hi-jacked” by other's agenda. She then claims that the school is “very much the government's agenda”.

Ms L I can remember sitting in the audience and hearing him [Tom Bentley] speak, [...] he was saying that you have to be subversive, with a small 's', if you want to do the sort of things you want to do. [...] And what he was basically saying was you do what you really want to do and you don't have to be hijacked by anyone else's agenda, you don't have to take any notice of that. You keep doing what you really think you should be doing. [Providing your SATs results are good, and they are,] I think we can do whatever we want to do. As long as we're following the rules, we're not wacky people, we're not out of the mainstream, we're truly mainstream -

Ms F - no.

Ms L [...] We're very much the government's agenda but the heart of it's got the learning. And I think he made me take a few more risks than I would normally (Pri 1 HT).

Both sides of some kind of fence appear to be occupied here: subversion, avoiding being hijacked, but also being identified with the government's agenda, not being wacky. Perhaps the key phrase is “but the heart of it's got the learning”. This school had an active programme for developing effective learning with all the staff and had integrated some ideas from Accelerated Learning, especially related to learning styles, into the literacy programme. The analysis of the headteacher's words points to a difficulty in reconciling the policy agenda with the experiences of learning within the school.

In the other primary school two teachers were actively involved in an LEA learning project called *Learning about Learning*. They were the headteacher and the Y3 class teacher (Ms J). In this school the pressures of the government's agenda for improvement were experienced differently by the three teachers I met. The headteacher found considerable tensions between a heavily content-based curriculum represented by the “rigid” time-tabling of literacy and numeracy strategies and the kind of approach that the project had stimulated her to think about. This rigid timetable prevented the children from “discussing their learning, thinking about their learning, and have a discourse themselves about what they are doing” (Pri 2 HT). She had become a headteacher at the time the National Curriculum was introduced, and commented that “throughout my time

as head I still had to focus on what the children need to know, rather than how the children are going to learn". The word "still" referred to her time as a class teacher, when what the children should learn had been her preoccupation, without the direction of the prescribed curriculum. "I don't really think I thought about how children learn at all".

The other teacher in this school who was involved in the same project experienced this conflict between the government agenda and her own in a slightly different way. She explained that she would experience pressure to change her classroom practice the following year. "I can imagine instantly feeling extremely pressured by the whole SATs thing and all of that good practice going rapidly out of the window" (Pri 2 T1). Despite the pressure to produce good results, in the past as well as the future, Ms J felt that she had the confidence to suggest to her headteacher that a tension existed. It was the school's managers who would have to decide between following the government's performance agenda and promoting good practice, in her view.

So I have no qualms in saying to her [the headteacher], if we are going to believe in this we can't worry about how many people get level three in writing at Year 2. And that is the conflict (Pri 2 T1).

A third teacher in this school said she knew nothing about the project in which her colleagues were involved. She was experiencing the government agenda as pressure on the teachers. She passed on pressure for performance to her class. She also found the target setting initiative, passed down by the government, difficult to reconcile with her practice. Targets, she claimed, come from a different discourse, business talk, and one that does not relate to people.

And like the Government tried to treat the school like a business. And it's not. You know, you're dealing with people, and especially young minds and children, and we cannot treat it like a business. But they want to and they are, you know, with all these targets and stuff. I mean targets is business talk and we are dealing with people (Pri 2 T2).

She thought that the concept of targets might be valid but she was not sure that it worked in practice. She cited the difficulties of knowing when targets have been achieved, the increased burden on teachers. "I mean I know why people are

leaving teaching. It's very hard" (Pri 2 T2). At one point in our conversation I referred to these tensions, which she took as a criticism. "No I'm saying lots of things that are disparate really. So I don't know if you can make any sense of it."

This teacher's apparent confusion, and the tensions experienced by her colleagues in the same school, all point to the difficulties teachers have in reconciling the pressures of an agenda and discourse that promotes performativity with the practice of teaching in their school. These are expressed in terms of choices between rigidity and flexibility, between performance levels in tests and good practice in learning and in treating schools as communities of people or as businesses. The third teacher talked about the difficulty of keeping the balance: perhaps she did not want to make a choice, or to choose both, which may not be possible. This will be discussed further in Chapter 9.

In one secondary school the tensions related to coverage of the curriculum, creating tensions between teachers about the activities of a project intended to impact on students' achievement and motivation. Judgements about teachers, bound up with reaching targets and covering the National Curriculum, appeared to be in tension with enriching the students' experiences. It was expressed in conflicting priorities when time is limited:

Ms B I know there are demands made by the government saying, you know, "reach certain targets" and then there's the National Curriculum to follow, and we are bogged down with a lot of work, and I can completely understand that. But I think that if we are always gonna say that we haven't got time as a resource, I don't think it's fair to the students to say that ... It's difficult for them [teachers] when you are trying to get through a syllabus. I do understand that. But I don't think they see this – you know making a film – as learning. They don't see this as enrichment, they see this as added on, it's an attachment (Sec 2 T1).

In the other secondary school the tensions are revealed in the differences between the teachers' and the students' beliefs about the efficacy of target setting, discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

Conclusion

The discourse of performance was evident in all four schools. Some effects of a policy of that emphasises performance, reinforced through accountability procedures that hold both schools and individual teachers to account have been discussed. This is a particular feature of the UK at the moment and it would be interesting to compare the discourses of performativity reported here with those in another country. It is significant that in the schools that I visited the teachers and the students were experiencing discursive conflicts differently. For the teachers it was with the policy context, for the pupils it was the classroom conditions they experienced where they are required, largely, to be “sitting down and writing”. The implications of both sets of tensions are very significant for considering how learning can be improved in schools. This will be explored following a description of the other discourses. The next chapter describes the discourse of work, which shares similarities with the discourse of performance.

Chapter 7. The Discourse of Work – *sitting at tables and writing*

The second discourse is that of work and it operated both in discussions with the youngsters and in the classrooms where it was especially dominant. It appeared less in conversations with teachers and this may be that it was taken for granted that as a teacher I would share an understanding of the need for hard work. Or it may be that it comes to the fore only in the immediacy and bustle of the classroom. This discourse shares many features with that of performance. However, the discourse of work is centrally concerned with activity that leads to completion of tasks. In contrast, in the performance discourse the focus is on the evaluation of the outcome of learning. The two discourses are often evident in the same chunk of conversation and even the same sentence, without any apparent dissonance.

Purposes in the discourse of work

In this discourse the purpose of activity is the completion of the task, usually a concrete product, usually writing. Y11 girls described the expected outcome of their labours on the geography GCSE coursework as “a wodge of paper” (Sec1 Y11). The classrooms were awash with teachers exhorting their students to get on with or to complete their tasks and with the necessity of doing this within a time limit. The students are provided with worksheets, or other tasks referred to as work. It is unclear why the young people should want to complete the tasks at all, let alone quickly, as the reward for completion is often more work. “Get that done quickly and then we can move on to the next thing,” and “When you have finished that work there is more to do,” said two primary teachers. Work is what students do in the classroom.

The teachers' task is to keep the young people busy. The classroom is managed through the tasks, and the goals of the activities are therefore downplayed, along with the learning. Some tasks seemed empty of any purpose other than to keep the young people occupied. A Y10 English class I observed was required to complete a worksheet on a Conan Doyle story. Most of the activities required the

students to find the right place in the text and copy relevant words, phrases or sentences. Neither the purpose of looking at this story nor the purpose of the activity were explored or questioned by the teacher or the students. It was a particularly frustrating experience for everyone. The two teachers in the room spent their time going from student to student, helping them identify where to look. There was such a demand for this assistance that one student got frustrated by waiting and asked me to help him.

In other lessons I observed the activity itself became more important than the learning. I observed three lessons involving computers, where the product took precedence over the learning objectives. In the Y11 geography lesson the students were creating a variety of graphs for their GCSE coursework. A Y8 history class were editing a video of a class production about Mary Tudor. A Y8 literacy class were writing alternative versions of Little Red Riding Hood. In all three lessons the students were highly engaged choosing the most vivid or dramatic images and formats that they could manipulate. Learning was limited to manipulation skills and to exploring the range of formats available. They were not assessing which were the appropriate formats for conveying the information or to support their ideas. In fact there appeared to be very little link between content and presentation. All three classes were highly engaged with the activities.

In the discourse of work, production is completed in separate units (like the production line of a factory¹). Often there is a view that these units of production need to be put together in a specific sequence, overlapping with the discourse of performance, where sequential learning is also significant (see Chapter 6).

Good learning means getting it right and getting as much done as you can. Satisfaction comes from completing the task not from the learning from it. In one of the secondary schools two Y9 students explained how they knew they were doing well:

¹ I was prompted to think of this as 'the IKEA approach to work' when one Y11 student (Sec 1) said, "It's like building something with the instructions," referring to the guidance from his teacher to improve his coursework.

Aiyat You are getting most of your work right.

Gavin You're getting more of it done. (Sec 2 Y9).

Some students would include the idea of learning more, faster. Usha made this observation when asked if there was anything else members of the group wanted to say about learning. She is getting close to the idea that you bank your learning for future benefits.

You know when you're learning, you shouldn't think that it's boring, you should think that you can get more things in your brain and you can have a job or something that's really good – like when I grow up I want to be a doctor (Pri 1 Y4).

Getting more things into your brain implies a view that knowledge is out there, and needs to be brought inside your head. An epistemological aspect of the discourse is that in this discourse knowledge is seen as a commodity to be acquired. More is therefore better. The work lies in getting more things in your head, and we hear the echoes of adults' voices, perhaps, in her claim that more knowledge will bring a good job or other future benefits. This brings to mind Freire's banking metaphor (see Chapter 4). The exchange of knowledge for future life benefits is a trading model. Usha expects to make withdrawals later².

Teachers also promote the view that more work is better. The students will often resist this pressure for more. Teachers demand that students should at least be 'on task' during school time³. This pact will be challenged where the demands

² Usha returned to this theme after her friend Aysha had added her comments about how it is easier to learn when you are younger. Usha confirmed the banking image in the following comments, where going up and up is not about progress, but about going up into Year 6 or to high school:

"And when you're doing 11+ tests and things like that you'll also relate to your jobs as well, because your reports at school and how you behave will just go up and up and up every single year. And when you are in Year 6 all your things you've done and everything will go on to high school and then go on and on and on" (Pri 1 Y4).

³ An advert current at the time of writing makes its impact by challenging the viewer's assumptions. It pictures a boy sitting at a desk in a classroom, apparently dreaming while the rest are busy writing. The caption, however, suggests he is "the clever boy". Both the advert and Barber's story about asking a boy to stop

for more work are made, perhaps in response to the external context of the school. Some students had developed elaborate strategies for avoiding being challenged (see below).

Hard work is what students believe is required of them. This is a view shared by many teachers and students. Frequently individuals, groups and whole classes were praised for their hard work during my observations. In a Y10 Business Studies class (Sec 2) I observed one student spend most of the lesson fiddling with his cricket bat and talking with his neighbour – not ‘on task’. Towards the end of the lesson he asked the teacher what grade she thought he would get at GCSE. He claimed that he worked hard. He seemed to be unaware of what hard work or effort might mean to the teacher, but he pushed his claim for a good grade on the grounds that he worked hard.

Effects in the discourse of work

As with the discourse of performance previously discussed, the effects of learning in this discourse are closely connected to the purposes. The effect of work is to be free to move on to the next thing, or to repeat the activity in a slightly modified form. The attraction of target setting for those who operate within this discourse can perhaps be explained here. The representation of learning as activities to be checked off when they are completed is similar to the idea of achieving targets.

In this discourse work and fun are opposed. However, some teachers try to challenge this view of work as in the following guidance by the headteacher of a Y6 student’s new secondary school, visited two weeks before:

Stan The headteacher said in order to succeed, every time you go to a lesson you need to work as hard as you can but also have fun. He said that at this school we are going to try to make every single lesson you have fun, but also try to make you learn more than you already know and learn better (Pri 1 Y6).

thinking and get on with his work are effective because our expectation, the dominant discourse, is that work, being ‘on task’, is what good students do.

The students themselves recognised that work could be fun, but it is the conditions in which they work that make the fun possible. They reported positive feelings about work but it was not described as fun.

Strategies in this discourse

The strategies that young people engaged to be successful in this discourse are obvious – working hard is the key one. There is an expectation that working hard will result in good learning. Good learners, according to Y4 students, work hard. “Put some effort into it” and “you probably get more marks” (Pri 1 Y4). This was also the view of the student in the Business Studies lesson. As Kershner (1996) has observed, discussion about the reasons for working hard in school and how to set about it are rare. She reports on the meanings that young people attached to hard work in the *Making Your Way through Secondary School* study. Young people believed that hard work was necessary to get qualifications, good jobs and to get somewhere in life. Some also reported enjoying hard work for its own sake. It usually meant, in her study, independent, silent, written work. Harder work resulted in a greater quantity of neater and more accurate writing. Only a few students referred to thinking or concentrating in her study. The students with whom I talked appeared to share these ideas about hard work.

The role of the teacher, in this discourse, is to ensure that the students work hard. One teacher described how she put pressure on her class

But the children, they know, they know right from the beginning - I mean, my class – I say they have to work hard, behave well, I expect them to be the best class in the school, I expect them to work really hard, and I just push them (Pri 2 T2).

Both performance and work discourses are present here – working hard to be the best in the school. I asked the teacher what she did to help them in addition to putting them under pressure. She replied by returning to the subject of pressure:

I just say, I mean – you just give them deadlines, throughout the lesson, I want this done, it's on the board, laid out quite clearly what you want done, its time is told to them, so you had ten minutes to do this, 20 minutes to do this, if it's not finished you stay in at playtime, or lunchtime, or for homework. They know there's a consequence if they don't. (Pri 2 T2).

The 'consequence' of not completing tasks in this classroom is a punishment. The importance of completion of work in a set time draws on efficiency and time and motion discourse of the factory age. However, for this teacher an emphasis on deadlines produced a tension between quality and production:

The problem with that can be that we rush to finish it and it's not good quality. It's a very delicate balance to get the best out of them and yet get it done. Yeah, finished. It's the finishing off that's the bind in primary school (Pri 2 T2).

The "delicate balance" is explored more fully in Chapter 9. Teachers sometimes requested their students to work faster. Along with working harder this is a taken-for-granted phrase, but both are harder to understand the closer you look at them. The phrases describe a feeling rather than any specific activities.

Another strategy, closely linked to working hard, is to persist. Ruth, a Y6 student, had this advice for learning well:

Ruth You shouldn't give up. You should try and not quit. You should try it and see how it goes (Pri 1 Y6).

Rachel, in Y3 said something similar, having made several comments about how boring lessons are sometimes, especially numeracy lessons:

Rachel You have to sort of think you can do it, not think it's going to be really hard. You've got to put your heart into it and think, "Yes, I'm going to do this" (Pri 2 Y3).

I have already indicated that many students expressed a preference for activities involving pairs or small groups, and some of their explanations drew on the discourse of work. Efficiency, as in more speed and more accuracy, were invoked as benefits:

Tom Two minds are better than one.

Usha Like "many hands make light work" (Pri 1 Y4).

Aysha and Usha both liked working in pairs because they could work more efficiently, add more value:

Aysha When we're in pairs it helps us, because together we can cover it quicker. Like one can look at one book and one the other. And also when once

we've got some answers we can just get it together and combine it to one answer.

Usha And we can learn more about it, so for example your partner sitting next to you says something that you don't know and you say something that your partner doesn't know then you both will learn something – it will be even better (Pri 1 Y4).

Rachel, who found numeracy boring, also preferred to work with others to alleviate the stresses of work:

Rachel Because it's fun because if you do it with your friend. It makes it more interesting, but if you do it on your own you're like "oh no-o-o" [dramatic voice] but if you do it with your friend you go "okay, let's work this out together" [business-like voice]. And it's like a team (Pri 2 Y3).

She draws on another aspect of business and the world of work – working in a team, but neither Rachel nor her colleagues elaborated on this idea. Rosanna picked on the idea that in pairs “you can work more faster, easier”.

In lessons I observed another strategy for coping with the need to endure the work: avoidance. One way in which students did this was to avoid doing the prescribed tasks until the teacher finally challenged them. Many students were able to find a way to get the teacher to do the task for them at this point. The purpose was therefore achieved - the task was completed. Another response was to claim to have worked hard, knowing that the teacher might be uncertain having been occupied with others. This was a risky strategy, sometimes involving a bravura performance of injured *amour-propre*, at others it was not clear whether the student was deluding him/herself as well as their teacher. A third approach also took advantage of the teacher's preoccupation with others, involving much fiddling, fidgeting, low-level disturbance, all of which could be described as activity. As an observer, it seemed that so long as a certain level of disturbance was not exceeded the teacher would tolerate or not draw attention to this. Students may conform to the minimum demanded in exchange for minimum disruption (Woods, 1990). It was also clear, as an observer, that quite as much effort was put into avoiding work as might have been expended in doing it. Perhaps it was more fun.

Feelings and emotions in the discourse of work

Both primary and secondary students referred to the necessity of endurance. This was clearly described by a Y10 girl, who was comparing good and bad days at school. On good days, she affirms her presence at school in this way:

Gill You like, you just want to get everything done, "yes school, yes school". But other days when you're not understanding you're like, "oh god I wish this lesson would be over". But when you do understand everything you just want to do more (Sec 2 Y10).

Getting it right and getting more done can be a very positive, even physically exciting experience, as these two Y10 students confirmed:

Gill I think when you have a good learning experience it makes you feel better for the rest of the day. Well, I know it does for me. [...] you understand what you're doing and you get everything done. When you get a good lesson you feel more better with yourself. And you feel that you -

Darren - And you get through a lot of work as well, just like having PE, you like, it's like a rush innit? (Sec 2 Y10).

Usually work is not considered pleasant. Perhaps the most telling comment about learning - "It doesn't feel like work" - came from a Y9 student, talking about experiences of good learning they had had recently (Sec 2). Describing the recent Science Day, they explained that everyone was enjoying themselves, joining in – it is implied this happened without coercion.

CML And how is that different from ordinary classroom work and everyday lessons?

Arisha We're not sitting at tables and writing.

Gavin You can talk and that [...]

Susan It doesn't feel like work (Sec 2 Y9).

I note that I also used the word work here – intuitively operating within the same discourse. For these students writing and work are the same, and they are required to sit in one place, not at their ease, but at tables. When it doesn't feel like work, normal conversation is allowed ("you can talk and that").

A Y10 boy talked about prison camp when he compared his current school favourably with his previous secondary school:

My old school is horrible. You just sit there, open your book and get on with it. And you do nothing but work. And I think some of the students [here] don't appreciate what the lessons are like. They're a lot more fun. It's just the atmosphere's a lot more relaxed than in my old school. You don't have to stand outside and all get marched in, and like you're not allowed to take your blazer off and it was like prison camp [laughter] and here it's just so much more relaxed and you actually still get your work done to a high level and that's the good thing. You can still have fun – well, not all lessons are fun. But a lot of them (Sec 1 Y10).

Here again fun is opposed to work but as a false opposition. Jamie was claiming that it was possible to have fun and still get your work done, and to a high level. I asked them to consider whether the lesson we had just been in had been fun. They responded with restraint although Linda says, "it wasn't just working":

Linda We were allowed to work in groups and talk. I think it just made the atmosphere more relaxed and it wasn't just working – it's better that way [...]

Jamie I didn't really think it was fun. I don't like Shakespeare.

Linda It wasn't exactly fun, it was just relaxed –

John - Nice.

Linda Nice, yes. Comfortable.

Jamie It wasn't the worst lesson we've had (Sec 1 Y10).

Irony and humour are frequent student responses to the need to endure. One of the primary students early in a conversation, responding to the question about what they liked best in that lesson said, "Well, at first I thought it was when the teacher said, 'okay, close your books'" (Pri 2 Y3/4). We all understood this as a joke we could share based on assumptions that students want to escape their labours and teachers have to keep them at it. For some students finding humour in the lessons, at the expense of teachers or with them if they are willing, is how they keep going:

John You just make jokes about everything, cos otherwise you just sit there and go [makes bored face].

Jamie You try and make the most of things. You try and see the funny side of things. That's what keeps you going (Sec 1 Y10)

One school had challenged this notion that work must always be serious, at least for the teachers. In talking about how it was that teachers talked differently at this school, and about learning, the deputy suggested that it was largely because it took place in an atmosphere of play (Pri 1).

Contexts for learning as work

The conditions of the lessons required for the discourses of performance and work are similar: often individualist, even isolated, and physically controlled. In both discourses young people challenge these conditions. Work, as noted above is individualised, needs to be undertaken without interaction with others, "sitting down and writing" and "just me (one) and my work". Yet time and again students spoke of their desire to be able to talk, to be active and to be actively engaged with the tasks and with each other.

Teachers in the discourse of work

Both discourses, of work and of performance, reinforce the hierarchical relationship between teacher and learner, drawing on images of the foremen. There was no doubt that the young people saw the teacher as responsible for their learning. They expect the teachers to ensure they maximise their productivity, to check the quality of the work, to decide whether they can talk, collaborate, move about and have fun or merely endure. While the teachers did not articulate such a controlling role they expressed a strong sense of role difference and belief that the young people depend on them, especially for motivation.

There appears to be a connection between the need for young people to learn through hard work and concerns expressed by some teachers about motivating their students. Two points need to be made here. First, not all the teachers mentioned this. Second those who did by and large saw it as the teachers'

responsibility to motivate young people. This might be through the content of the lessons, or through the way it is delivered. It might also be through praise. In the conversations I recorded, two teachers saw motivation as something external to the young people, something that they had somehow to give to their students who lacked it. Consider this comment by a primary head:

Children here are motivated as you probably saw yesterday. They are keen. They are enthusiastic. The teachers are doing something that makes them want to get on with their work – whatever that [...] work may be [slight ironic laugh] (Pri 2 HT).

In the same school, the Y4 teacher referred to pressing the right buttons, which for her meant providing a range of experiences:

And they just become very enthused and then real learning does take place. And if they're not enthused, then it doesn't. And you just have to motivate them. And that's usually quite easy cos they're very willing to learn, if you press the right buttons (Pri 2 T2).

The phrase "real learning" implies there is something that could be called unreal learning. Perhaps unreal learning refers to compliance, rather than engagement.

Teachers in one of the secondary schools appeared to use praise to provide more motivation. In the school entrance hall the following words were painted across a prominent beam:

Achieving potential through the joy of learning, valuing individuals through respect, encouragement and praise (Sec 2).

In this school the teachers frequently praised students for their efforts and hard work. The Business Studies teacher began her lesson by referring to the previous lesson, when the students had "worked fast, well, really, really well". PE teachers frequently mixed praised and encouragement: "That's fantastic! Let's go! Well done, Mohammed!" (fieldnotes).

Motivation was not a word, or indeed a topic that the students raised with one interesting exception. This concerned a Y10 group discussing a target setting initiative about which they were very scornful (see Chapter 8). Jamie described how he felt obliged to make up a target of improving his motivation skills. He is

reporting a conversation with his tutor and is self-consciously using teacher terminology. Later he recast lack of motivation into his own terms. Then he calls it laziness.

Jamie You just had to make up answers. I was like, "errrr well I need to improve my motivation skills, yes, yes" [voice indicating lack of conviction]...

CML So tell me a bit about the targets you came up with. You landed on motivation did you?

Jamie Yeah, I just had to think of something – anything. At the end of the day if I'm not reaching the grades [I should] it's because I've been too lazy to do the homework. That is my weak spot. I'm too lazy. Clever but just lazy. But you just have to think of stuff. "Well, I think I should have more –" (Sec 1 Y10).

This particular group of students indicated an awareness of teacher discourse, and were able to make an approximate translation of it into their own everyday language. But lack of motivation is not the same thing as laziness. Jamie recognised that 'lazy' did not fit the tutor's discourse. Similarly, lack of concentration and talking too much in class are not the same. Translation seemed especially necessary, but also problematic, when dealing with the targets set by their teachers. (This was also observed in talk about learning styles - see Chapter 8).

Linda Stupid targets, like it's stuff you know you need to do. If someone's lazy or they talk too much, you can improve it, but you don't really. It's not something you think to try and sort out because as long as you get your work done it's all right (Sec 1 Y10).

Linda's criticism of teacher's approach to targets is set within the work discourse: so long as the work is completed there should be no problem. Here perhaps we can see the dominance of the discourse of work when teachers' simplistic talk about learning meets the more dominant discourse of work or is unconnected to the students' discourse.

Much of what teachers discussed with me was about the role of the teacher rather than about learning or learners. This is not surprising, for many reasons. They were talking about their everyday experiences; they are held accountable; they wish to make a difference themselves; we were speaking in school, which is

their professional domain. In addition, I had presented myself as a fellow teacher and they could expect me to take an interest in their activities. Most of those I spoke with implied that young people are dependent on teachers for their learning. The processes involved in the black achievement project that Ms B coordinated had challenged this power dynamic. The project provided enrichment activities based on discussion and student-led projects. She spoke about teachers who were unsympathetic to the project:

Ms B They find that scary when that role of the teacher is taken away from them. They see it as their power being taken away from them. [...] At the same time I have had teachers who wouldn't go near this [project] at all because everything is teacher led. They are at the front. They make the rules. I think that's a very traditional way of looking at it (Sec 2 T1).

She means that the teachers believe that everything should be teacher led. The project had produced negative reactions from these traditionalists.

This same teacher, however, indicated a rather narrow idea about her own identity as a teacher. She was describing how one student had been creating a film about the school as part of the project.

CML You said something really interesting then which was, "I've never taught her as a teacher".

Ms B Yeah. I've never been her teacher.

CML You mean her class teacher?

Ms B Yeah

CML But if you've been working with her on this project –

Ms B - I think working with her – yeah I have been her teacher. I haven't been her teacher in the sense I haven't been the teacher in the classroom who sets up rules and boundaries and is delivering something to them. It's almost like a, a, umm, I dunno, umm, someone who is guiding her, someone who is supporting her rather than a teacher because – umm my role is the co-ordinator, so I do sort of slip out of the teacher role when I am doing this. But it's a bit of a grey area, isn't it? I think (Sec 2).

Ms B contrasts being a teacher (setting rules and boundaries and delivering) with providing guidance and support. She sees her relationship with Gill not as

a teacher even after I had challenged her she reverts to a role descriptor (coordinator) to explain the different relationship. The hesitation in describing what it meant to be Gill's teacher refers to a lack of clarity ("grey") in her mind about their relationship.

Although I did not see any evidence that young people get a say in much of what happens in classrooms another teacher suggested that changes have happened:

Ms L It wasn't about having a dialogue [in the old days], because you couldn't have a dialogue in those days, it was you did what you were told and nobody had a voice (Pri 1 HT).

Both Ms B and Ms L seem to hint at a less directive relationship between teacher and student. Perhaps they are struggling towards this, but unable to escape the discourse of work. A teacher-centred view of learning dominated in all four schools.

Conclusion

The discourse was present in all four schools and was having an impact particularly in the classroom. The demand for work, for completion of tasks, for endurance, for production reflects meagre views of learning. This discourse emphasises memory and reproduction and the teacher's role. This is not to say that young people do not learn by working, only that the emphasis on work, like the emphasis on performance, may get in the way of any richer understanding of learning and sometimes diverts attention from learning.

Chapter 8. The discourse of Learning – *this is me having my say*

Most of the data I collected from observations and interviews were drawn from the discourses of learning as performance and work. In this chapter I explore a richer discourse, which I have called a discourse of learning. This discourse focuses on learning, on the conditions and processes that promote effective learning. While the discourses of performance and work draw on meagre views of learning, this discourse reflects a more complex view of learning. Its richness lies in the view of learning as more than an activity (work) whose outcome is publicly evaluated by others (performance). This discourse draws on the more constructivist meanings of learning:

- understanding things in a new way,
- seeing something in a different way, and
- changing as a person (described by Marton *et al*, 1993, see Chapter 4).

In these meanings, “the learners are highly involved in making meaning and interpreting events,” drawing on constructivist perspectives (Watkins *et al*, 1996). Outcomes include a sense of deeper knowledge, higher order skills, a view of greater complexity, positive emotions and feelings, enhanced sense of self, articulation of learning strategies and personal significance. I found traces of this richer discourse in the conversations with the young people and with their teachers, in some classrooms and in the documentary evidence collected from the schools. But this discourse was often swamped by the more dominant ones of performance and work. Many children and some teachers did not appear to draw on it at all.

Two schools volunteered materials to support and illustrate some of the things we had talked about. This documentary material was particularly rich in the discourse of learning. For example, Primary 1 gave me a copy of their staff handbook for 2000-2001. The folder was jumbo sized and contained a section called *Effective Learning*, 80 pages of articles about learning. The headteacher

provided me with many other papers relating to projects and developments she described, an Afro-Caribbean Boys' Achievement project, and Voices – an LEA approach to child led change, notes for training session on VAK¹ in the literacy hour, and other materials including the induction notes given to all supply and visiting teachers (including me) intended to ensure everyone involved with children's learning in school understood the values and standard processes.

... we have a commitment to helping children to learn about their learning and we want to promote high self-esteem and achievement for all groups. ... We have an agreed set of preferred practices – how we teach and facilitate learning here at [Primary 1]. (From *Information for Supply/Visiting Teachers*, emphasis in original).

The secondary school provided me with a copy of the booklet called *Language for Thinking and Learning* and a folder of materials about a 'learning fair' that they had organised for teachers in spring 2000. This school was also involving parents in this rich discourse, for example I was given a copy of a 16-page A4 booklet called *You can do it! Parents' Guide to Boosting Children's Motivation and Achievement*.

This material was serendipitous, acquired as conversations with teachers unfolded. The other schools may have had similar documentation but it was not offered. Teachers can draw on the discourse of documentary materials, especially when other colleagues referred to it. For example, in the secondary school it was clear that all teachers were expected to be familiar with the 'taxonomy of thinking' page in the booklet referred to above, when it was referred to in the target setting staff development session (see Appendix 6). A question that needs to be asked is whether teachers would have access to this richer discourse if it were not available in this form, especially those who had been trained at a time when understanding about learning was rooted in behaviourist traditions, drawing on a transmission-reception model of teaching-learning.

¹ VAK refers to learning styles as described by those who follow Accelerated Learning programmes. The letters stand for visual, auditory and kinaesthetic styles of learning (Smith, 1996).

Because the documentation was not systematically collected, I am not claiming that it represents the only written discourse of learning. But it is of interest because it represents one official view of the desired discourse by those who initiate, write and publish them. The documentary material provides an interface with the external context and discourses of learning. For example, the folder of materials on the learning fair contained a set of DfEE overheads on learning. The sections in the staff handbook included research reviews by education researchers (including one I co-authored), many of whom had led professional development session in both these schools along with other consultants. One document mapped the school's journey over the last few years, noting significant people who had helped them exploring learning about learning. The primary school had started their journey as a result of interaction with the LEA's PSHE² adviser, and the arrival of the Assistant Director of education was also noted as a milestone on the journey. She had also co-authored the research review included in the handbook. The school was also explicitly involving the parents in this discourse in their newsletter to parents. The material drew on the richer discourse, but schools are also awash with performance data (for example: the Autumn Package, OFSTED reports, scores from ALIS (A-Level Information System) and YELIS (Year Eleven Information System), local authority comparison tables and so forth). They generate more of this performance data themselves. Sometimes these discourses are in conflict (see below). Sometimes they exist in different layers.

In the four schools I visited the richer discourse was discernible, although faintly in some settings, especially in speech among some young people, some teachers and in the classroom. The schools had been chosen because they had been exploring learning and therefore could be expected to give more space to this discourse. In other schools the discourse might be more difficult still to identify. Each of the following five features was evident in some talk or situations and these are now considered in turn:

² Personal, Social and Health Education.

- the learner making connections with previous knowledge, and their own lives,
- actively constructing knowledge,
- learning collaboratively,
- taking responsibility for one's own learning, and
- self-awareness or meta-cognition.

Connectivity, meaning and authentic voice

The young people wanted learning that connects with the world in which they live. This is partly to do with the content – what they learn – but also with the conditions in which they learn it. The connection with content is well summarised by Chris, who explained his enthusiasm for his GCSE coursework on vandalism in his area in the following way:

Yeah, this is me, having my say on the area. [...] With other coursework, it's like volcanoes or something. I've never been near a volcano. And I don't really care. But with this it's an opportunity to write something that I care about. [...] I'm more into this than any other coursework we've had so far because it really does interest me (Sec 1 Y11).

It is notable that Chris has reversed the usual directional relationship of knowledge and learner – he is into this, not putting the knowledge inside his head. Relevance to oneself was a key point for another student:

It's supposed to be yourself. That's what life's about. So you write what you feel, you don't write what you think they'd like [GCSE examiners]. What's the point in that? (Sec 1 Y10).

An example of the students seeking connectivity can be seen in the following long extract from a conversation with a Y10 group who had just experienced a lesson about Iago's views of women in *Othello*. As part of the lesson they had been given an article written in the mid-80s about what adolescent boys called girls. They were agreeing that reading this was the best thing about the lesson. They recognised their own experiences in the article: "I know that" and "It's all

true". They then went on to identify other themes in *Othello* - racism, adultery, murder and prejudice - modern and local themes.

Jamie I don't really like Shakespeare that much but I enjoyed that article because you can relate to it.

John Cos it was all people our age -

? - yeah.

John - yes because as you read you said I know that, I know that {...]

Linda Yeah everything you read was true, I mean, it was true. I mean it was all about what sort of things boys say about girls and why they say them, giving reasons why they called them things that they do. It was all true.

CML Even 20 years later?

Several yeah yeah

Linda Yes even the names, everything was exactly the same. Nothing's changed at all. [...]

CML What are the other modern themes that you have come across in *Othello* [ie in addition to what boys call girls]?

Linda It's just -

? - racism.

Linda - racism, adultery, murder -

CML an everyday story of life in the Midlands then?

Linda Pretty much, yeah! [laughter]

Jamie Prejudice, there was back there and it's the same today ... apart from the wording he uses in his play it's just the same.

John I think if you modernised it, it would be -

? - a good film.

John [laughs] Yeah, it would be very much like a film, yeah, but like a computer game.

Jane If you modernised it and made it on the stage a lot of people would really, really relate to it because it's so modern. If you brought the wording up to date then people would really ... [tails off]

CML And is it telling you things that are relevant to your lives? That have meaning in your lives?

Jamie I don't think at this age it has much relevance, but for parents or when you're older it probably does (Sec 1 Y10).

One of the features of this extract is the short (and rapid) exchange between all the participants. There is considerable overlap and building on each other's ideas. The themes of this part of the conversation appeared familiar to the young people. Compare it with the next extract, which is about the students' reactions to much of the content of lessons at school. At first they had continued to interact quickly in response to my prompt about when it feels good to be learning, but then they began taking longer turns, develop their ideas about learning. These ideas are less familiar and they allowed each other to work out examples, building on them, before returning to the theme of *Othello*.

Jamie I did a first aid course last weekend and you feel, "Oh yeah I can use this now if I see someone there on the floor". And you feel happy with yourself because you know you have learned something that you can use. Personally this stuff about Iago, once we've finished the subject, I'm never going to use again it in my life.

John I think that about maths lessons as well. You learn algebra and stuff. You don't learn about how to do a tax return or something. A tax return, I'm going to use that. Algebra: x minus two x times three. When are you going to use that? -

Linda - And in an office situation, if you are talking to your secretary or something, you're not exactly going to say [changes to posh stagy voice] Oh Iago thought that ... [laughter] (Sec 1 Y10).

This extract reveals that the students are keen to make authentic connections, even if it appears to have been expressed in a rather instrumental approach to learning - its value depends on its subsequent use. But it provides a contrast to most statements made by the students about why they thought they were learning something (reported in previous chapters): the teacher says, it is needed for the next stage or it might be useful later. A less instrumental view was expressed by another group of Y10 students who saw being in a 'real' situation as active:

Susan Drama. That's good because recently we've been, we learned more stuff, because we had to put ourselves in the position, we had to pretend that we was running an event and it was really good. The things we were doing made it really fun.

Gill You're running your own business, you've put yourself in the situation where, like, it's my big business and everything I do is my decision and everything is on me and so what would I do. It's my decision and, like, how will it affect other businesses and stuff (Sec 2 Y10).

The significant and nearly repeated phrase here is "in the position, in the situation". This indicates the desire for authentic connections although we should also note that Susan's comments relate to the discourse of work ("learning more stuff"). As the next example also shows this discourse sometimes contained elements of the richer discourse. Here Usha, in Y4, refers to learning more and faster, but also includes the idea of extending knowledge by asking questions that relate to previous knowledge. This is good learning in her terms:

Sometimes when, like, as soon as you learn something, they learn it quick and they start asking questions which relate to the question that they learned, which might be like learning more as well as learning faster (Pri 1 Y4).

In this discourse the young people are variously

- relating new meaning to existing knowledge,
- reflecting on current experience, and
- using and applying the learning to future experiences (Watkins *et al*, 1996).

It is in this sense of making connections and adding variation to previous knowledge that this discourse differs from learning as performance or work. The connection is not just related to some potential, instrumental purpose in the future (for GCSE work, for a job) but connected to their lives now, as in the example of what boys call girls.

Some teachers also struggle with the problem of connecting the content with young people's lives. Traditionally in schools young people have had minimal input into what they should learn, and since the 1990s teachers have felt constrained by the National Curriculum and associated testing. In my

discussions the teachers did not discuss what young people should learn, with the exception of one primary head for whom this had always been an issue. She said that children are entitled to know about things relevant to their context, repeating the questions she had been asking since she began teaching:

You know, what is it that makes this interesting? What makes them want to find out more about whatever it is that they're doing in the classroom? What is it that engages them as learners? And also, you know, what engages the teachers? And so what I've always tried to do here, as Head, is, um, to give the children a broad experience so we do have a lot of music, we have music and dance specialists, we have a lot of visitors, and go on many, many visits to enrich the curriculum. And funnily enough, this is what the government is thinking about now (Pri 2 HT).

One of the most difficult tensions for her was between the pressure of ensuring that young people experienced all the important opportunities and a more relaxed and creative approach to their learning.

Active learning

The theme of connectivity relates to content, but also to the way in which the young people learn. I have already referred to the challenges to the discourses of performance and work that young people pose when they consider the conditions in which they are expected to learn. So many of the classroom conditions discourage activity and connectivity in learning. Active learners are not isolated, unconnected as Gill and Darren explained. They had mentioned active lessons and I prompted them to say more.

- Gill

Not necessarily active but less, kind of, alone.
- Darren

Not lessons where you've got to sit down and be silent for 50 minutes.
- Gill

Yeah, when you can get up and do things. It makes it more fun.
- CML

[challenges about the lesson just observed – the students had been sitting in the same place all lesson]
- Gill

Yes, but it was still active, because I mean I can still crack jokes with her [the teacher], and its an interesting lesson and I'm still active because I'm talking about the work at the same time, so in a way it's still active. Instead of just me (one) and my work.

Darren Yes, just you, a pen and a piece of paper. (Sec 2 Y10).

Actively making meaning is implied in the need to talk about the classroom activities ("I'm still active because I'm talking about the work ..."). The reference to the teacher is important. Young people see this kind of lesson as in the gift of the teacher, because they can insist on silence or allow some fun and still ensure that learning takes place. The young people felt this largely depended on their relationships with the teachers, and how teachers saw young people. Activity in learning facilitates connection, dialogue and co-construction of meanings and requires opportunities for collaboration, to which we now turn.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning was not the norm in the schools I observed. In most lessons children sat at tables individually engaged in writing tasks: "sitting and writing". The presence of computers in classrooms could challenge this physical arrangement, but in many classrooms that I saw the computers were spread around the periphery of the classroom allowing the dominant arrangement to continue. Taking turns or collaborative use of computers was encouraged because schools cannot afford to provide computers for every student. But the focus is so often on the product, and the physical arrangements for more than two students sharing one workstation so cramped, that this is usually a limited form of collaboration.

I used the following quotation earlier when referring to the unpleasantness students experience in their learning contexts. Here I am repeating it to make a different point. A requirement for silence also makes collaboration difficult.

Jamie Some teachers think that silence is a good thing when it's not.

Linda Yeah, nobody wants to learn. [...]

Jamie There will always be subjects or parts of subjects that you don't enjoy. That's the worst thing about it. And you're not going to add to it by making them sit in silence (Sec 1 Y10).

As discussed in previous chapters, students like to learn in pairs or small groups. Teachers encourage some collaboration in the classroom, sometimes as a

pragmatic way of easing the pressure on themselves: shared marking, explanations and so forth. There were many occasions when I observed students spontaneously or under instruction helping each other. When computers were involved, students routinely requested assistance from each other. In PE lessons, teachers encouraged comments from other students on individual performance. No doubt this was to develop awareness of some of the aspects on which they wanted the students to focus. Sometimes this developed into coaching – a mixture of demonstration, close observation and frequent feedback. In the numeracy and literacy lessons, students were frequently called on to help each other out when they were stuck. This did not always mean providing an answer, but could be suggestions as to how to proceed. I observed this helpfulness taking place in the individual sessions that followed the whole class sessions. On these occasions boundaries between roles became blurred – students were acting as teachers. Where not enjoined to sit in silence or to ‘work’ on their own, students I observed naturally engaged in talk with each other. I say naturally because there are so few occasions when people who know each other sit in silence while engaged in the same activity: attending a performance, attending church, sleeping. Frequently I observed students collaborating in their learning, engaging in dialogue about the topic and how to go about the tasks.

Group activity frequently occurred spontaneously, and was tolerated by the teacher so long as it did not become too loud. In reviewing my fieldnotes I find that only on three occasions did teachers structure lessons to involve collaborative activities. One lesson was the English lesson about Iago, referred to above, in which the students collaborated in pairs on each of the tasks. A second English lesson also required the students to discuss in pairs what they thought about some popular publications.

The third example was a special lesson that the deputy head organised because I had asked to observe one more class and to talk with students afterwards. It was near the end of term and she made arrangements to do an experimental lesson with the Y6 class, to relieve the teacher from the pressures involved in having a researcher sit in. This lesson was introduced as experimental and at the end Ms F

thanked the students for allowing her to try it out. The lesson was intended to help young people to listen to each other and to develop an argument partly through taking account of contrary views. To do this the children were required to collaborate in small groups, to listen and discuss each other's ideas and then to test their own ideas in a larger forum. The topic was the building of a Sports Complex in the local area, which engaged every child's active interest. After the lesson, the youngsters told me what they had enjoyed about the lesson:

John The great discussion we had, about the arguments for and against. [...] A good way to get across an argument in a discussion.

Stan I felt really – like - cos most of the people were - some people were my friends, and some people weren't but the people who weren't my friends I felt a bit how they saw and how clever and intelligent they were towards what we were doing. As I said, I liked all the vibes from everyone, talking about what we were doing and it just felt smooth for everyone to be talking at the same kind of level at what we were doing. And all the minds were thinking at the same time and thinking the same thing.

Ruth When I was sitting and watching it felt like a proper real meeting (Pri 1 Y6).

They responded enthusiastically to achieving the purposes of the lesson, to the authenticity of the experience and to the engagement at a personal and human level.

Responsibility in Learning

In the previous two chapters I have indicated that the discourses of performance and work encourage learner dependence on the teacher. The discourses draw heavily on the view that learning is a passive activity of absorbing knowledge, mostly from the teacher, but also from books and other sources. Alternative views of learning see the learner as having more responsibility for their own learning. Sometimes the alternative to dependence on the teacher is described as independence. In richer discourses of learning however, the emphasis is not on independence, which can exclude collaboration, so much as on responsibility for their own learning. I did not hear the young people talk about this aspect of effective learning. This is perhaps not surprising. The conversations took place in schools, in the context of a lesson they had just experienced. Schools are not

places that encourage learner responsibility: the accountability agenda puts responsibility for learning on the teachers, individually and collectively. The students have very few choices (about what they learn, where, when, how and with whom), very few opportunities to exercise judgement or to suggest alternatives.

The teachers, however, despite managing the system that provides so few opportunities for students to exercise responsibility in their learning, often expressed the desire that students should be more responsible for their own learning. One of the most clear about this was the headteacher of the first secondary school. I observed occasions when she gave young people responsibility for finding solutions to problems within the school, but more significantly was the role she took in the staff development session concerned with developing the target setting practices in the school. The teachers were being asked to consider how they would help the young people achieve their learning targets and how judgements could be made about whether targets had been met. The session was intended to identify practical steps to do this. Teachers discussed ideas and possibilities in year and departmental teams. My field notes suggested that they were very focused on their own actions: "teachers appeared to talk as if they controlled the process and needed reminding that pupils did things which did not require their time" (fieldnotes). The headteacher prompted the teachers to consider how the students could review their own progress. When the English teachers were discussing how the members of the department would know when targets had been achieved she gently reminded them that it was the students who needed to know this. And in closing the session she reminded the teachers, "target setting is not an end in itself. It is a means by which we can help young people understand learning and learning in school" (fieldnotes).

By these interventions she appeared to be trying to shift the discourse from a teacher-centred to a student-centred one, focusing on the students' development of understanding, rather than on the teachers' evaluation of the students' performance. In both secondary schools the experience of target setting was that

the young people received their targets from the teachers. These students were discussing their experience of target setting with the teachers I had observed on the staff development session.

CML So tell me a bit about the targets you came up with. You landed on motivation did you?

Jamie Yeah, I just had to think of something – anything. At the end of the day if I'm not reaching the grades [I should] it's because I've been too lazy to do the homework. That is my weak spot. I'm too lazy. Clever but just lazy. But you just have to think of stuff. "Well, I think I should have more –"

Jane So I said that, I had nothing I need to improve on they said, "what about your concentration skills Jane?"

John You let them put that down.

Jamie You let the teacher do the talking. "So you need confidence?" "Yes, confidence, yes!".

John I had continued effort. [...]

Linda Stupid targets, like it's stuff you know you need to do. If someone's lazy or they talk too much, you can improve it, but you don't really. It's not something you think to try and sort out because as long as you get your work done it's all right.

Jane If you really want to improve you'll go about it yourself and you'll think how –

Linda - not because the teacher filled the sheet in –

Jane - yeah, not because someone's told you to do it (Sec 1 Y10).

It was clear that the teachers had tried to engage the youngsters in talking about targets, but, as Linda's and Jane's final comments suggests, it was still controlled by the teachers.

We should also note that the targets discussed by tutors and students are behavioural ones (concentration and confidence). The language of target setting does not invite a discussion about what is being targeted. In this school the discourse used in target setting appeared to be about the learner not the learning. The students had even less invitation to discuss their targets in the other secondary school.

Gavin We have, like, a target setting day when we go down to see our form tutor and she, like, tells us our targets and that and we have to write them down in our diaries (Sec 2 Y9).

I came across occasions when teachers reported deliberately giving some responsibility to their class for their learning or for thinking about it. I do not wish to imply that students take no responsibility for their learning, because many do. Here I am meaning an intentional and explicit stepping outside the norm. Ms B reported her exasperation with behaviour in a Y9 class, and how eventually she said:

"Ok, you decide what you want to do in this lesson, considering you have got your SATs coming up. What would you like me to teach, how would you like the layout of the classroom? How do you want to sit? Do you want to sit together?" So I gave them the power of choosing what they actually want to do, how they want to do it within reason. And that was something that worked really well. ... We went back and we looked at teaching, at what they wanted to achieve, how they wanted to be assessed, we looked at behaviour ... they set it up. They did a survey in the classroom about all these five factors. They asked each other about the best strategy, cos that was what we were trying to get from them. What is the best way of learning and what is the best way for me to teach them. ... And it was all about eliminating those boundaries of the teacher and student relationships (Sec 2).

It is not clear what came out of this experiment, except Ms B's learning as a teacher³.

It can be difficult for teachers to allow students to take on more responsibility while they remain accountable for performance of their classes. Ms D was one teacher who did not see responsibility as a zero sum option (a fixed amount exists, distributed between participants) but as something that could be shared. She had recently joined the school because she was excited about what they were doing. I observed her lesson, and although I was focused on processes and the students I also learned a great deal about cumulative frequency curves. It was a

³ Ms B reported the reaction of one student who gained insight into teacher's stress as he took the teacher's role:

"I was playing up and they did not know how to take me because I was outside the context of the teacher. Afterwards he said, 'Ma'am, I'd rather be on heroin than actually be a teacher.'" (Sec 2 T1).

Friday afternoon in January and the first sunny day for some time. I sat at the back of the classroom with a great deal of reluctance, wishing to be outside, not observing a third lesson that day.

This lesson and the learning of the young people were undoubtedly led by the teacher. However, it was not teacher-centred. She encouraged them to connect with the learning, explaining the use that could be made of cumulative frequency curves and frequency polygons as she demonstrated how to draw them. She engaged them with the processes of drawing the graph as she modelled, coached and encouraged them to practice with explicit guidance.

The lesson was active, in the sense that the class was busy throughout the 50 minutes, ending with a rapid mental maths session. The students did not help each other, solve problems together, nor talk about what they were doing in pairs or groups. On the other hand there was a great deal of interaction with the teacher. She emphasised the idea of practice. She modelled a graph on the board, while the class followed each stage. Having set up a chart she asked the students for suggestions about how to read the graph. She used questions to ensure they understood. The invitation to the students to question was a particular feature of the lesson. One of Ms D's first statements was, "you can ask as many questions as possible in order to be sure you understand." She encouraged them with phrases such as "say what you are not sure about," "try doing that," "try and see" and "estimate". When a student asked, "what do all these arrows mean?" she asked for suggestions. I noted that the students were confident about not knowing. One said, "I haven't got the foggiest where you got that figure from" and another said, "I don't understand why you did that". The explanation to this student produced the only 'ah-ha' moment I observed in any lesson, a moment when new understanding comes suddenly and discernibly.

This teacher structured her lesson in such a way that the students took responsibility for their learning. It was teacher-led but learner-centred.

Meta-cognition

One of the most significant aspects of a rich discourse of learning is that it recognises the importance of meta-cognition. By meta-cognition I mean an awareness of how the strategies used in learning, and an ability to talk about learning. Some very young school children demonstrated an awareness of their own strategies. Ms J's was involved in a project on *Learning about Learning*. This Y3 teacher was keen to try out some of the ideas prompted by the sessions.

Ms J I started at the base point of asking them what they thought learning was. Which was quite interesting, because a lot of their immediate response was about obtaining knowledge and what have you. So that was the initial discussion. And then we went off for a period of time into thinking about what was helping us with that. And they do find it hard. It's not easy to identify things beyond -. And a lot of people came up with very practical things which were the 'things' part of it that were identified in the four areas, things like the 100 squares and what have you. White boards and so on were a big craze at that stage. And we could have broken that down. A few of the children fortunately were throwing in other ideas [...] some of them were thinking in a slightly more sophisticated way. They saw that there was a pattern developing in terms of groups with the different areas of help that they receive. The most interesting part of all of that was once they had brainstormed all of those things and saw all the people that helped the, and the things, and the – I can't remember what the other thing was now -

CML - feelings?

Ms J Feelings. That's right. That was a big one. We then identified of all of those things what the most significant thing was. And I asked them that individually, as opposed to as a whole class. And they all pretty much without exception, came up with encouragement and good explanation and just real positivity from the people who are part of the process. And also the fact that it was the doing side of it and the practising and having time, which was all very interesting (Pri 2).

The outcomes of these discussions were displayed in the classroom. The display was entitled *Looking at Learning about Learning*. "We have been thinking carefully about what helps our learning. For most people what they do and how they feel about their learning are the most important". There were four lists of things that the children had identified in the activity: doing, people, feelings and things (see Appendix 5). This class had also given a whole school assembly about what they had learned about their learning.

I observed a numeracy lesson taught by Ms J, and afterwards interviewed four of the class members. In Chapter 3 I suggested that a richer discourse of learning would require opportunities to engage in talk about learning and engaging in activities that teachers have framed in terms of learning (rather than work or performance). Ms J's class had experienced this and they were articulate about their learning.

Individual students often revealed an awareness of themselves as learners not usually associated with very young learners, although Pramling (1990) has indicated that even pre-school children can become reflective about their learning when encouraged and given frameworks to do so. One of the youngest that I met was Catherine, in a Year 3/4 class who described how she did the task set (correcting grammar and punctuation in a passage given by the teacher). She explained that she had read the passage through, doing the corrections in her head as she went, and now she was writing it out, checking as she went. A Year 4 boy, Keith, described how he used a visualisation technique for the money tasks in his lesson, "With certain things like money I put like a lot of money in my head". In each conversation I asked the young people what they did when they were stuck. Perhaps the most surprising reply was Katie's, a Y1 pupil. She uses the example of confusing cats and dogs:

Katie Sometimes you can just usually work it out and you get it wrong and then you say that "is it really cats?" and then you are thinking ahead and it isn't cats it's dog (Pri 1 Y1).

A few minutes later she described her reasons for asking Jenny for help if she was still confused:

Katie Because Jenny says that "would you like some help?" And I say, "yes, I need a little bit of help". And she says, "Yeah. What do you think that word is? Do you think it's cats, do you think it's dog or do you think it's green?" And then I say "I think it's green" And she says, "do you think that's correct?" And I say, "yes," sometimes. And sometimes I say "no". Then Jenny says, "you're correct" or sometimes she says, "you have to think a bit more."

I like this example, because Katie connects this example to her previous one indicating her own emerging awareness of how she learns. She is able to explain something of how her friend's intervention helps her.

In the secondary schools there was less talk about strategies than in the primary schools. Teachers are increasingly using target setting as a strategy for engaging students in talk about learning strategies. It has been promoted by the government as a process to raise performance standards. In my conversations, as I indicated above, the students spoke of it being done to them. Here I want to draw attention to the unsophisticated, un-nuanced discussions they had with their teachers. Y10 students wanted to talk with their teachers about learning, but their experiences were not very satisfactory. They commented on discussions that had taken place within the context of target setting. It seems that the young people had exceeded the sophistication with which their teachers credited them:

John The questions they ask, questions like do you work best in a group, in pairs or on your own. What do you learn from a book?

Jamie Stupid.

John I mean – why? I learn because people tell me. You just had to make stuff up.

Jamie They'd ask you questions which were so basic you just couldn't answer them. Just stupid questions –

John Like yes and no questions –

Linda If you say yes they expect you to elaborate on it and you can't elaborate any more.

Jane Questions like "What do you need to do to improve?" And I said, which was rather stupid, I said "I don't need to improve - I've reached all my academic goals". So he [tutor] just made up stuff I had to improve on.

Jamie You just had to make up answers. [...]

Linda When they ask you about what style of learning you prefer - do you like to listen better or do you learn visually – and you don't think about that every day. You don't think when you are in an English lesson, "oh I'm listening", auditory –

John - that's how I learn.

Linda - and then you are expected to just tell the teacher, "Oh I learn by listening" and you don't know, you don't think about it.

Jamie You use all of them. It depends on the lesson. It's like a music lesson, you're going to listen aren't you?

Linda Art lesson you're going to look.

Jane Or if you're given a film to watch in English you're going to watch it aren't you?

Jamie You're not going to listen to the numbers in a maths lesson.
[laughter]

Linda What are they trying to tell me?

CML So you seem to be saying – have I got this right – that it needs to be more kind of sophisticated to be helpful? It's not, like, what kind of a learner are you.

Several Yeah (Sec 1 Y10).

This was in marked contrast to the belief of the teachers that the target setting occasion had been a very valuable experience. The point, here, is that the students want a more sophisticated conversation with their teachers about learning. They were critical of basic questions that led nowhere. They have seen the potential trap of focusing on learning styles, for example: you may need to use all of them. They were similarly unenthusiastic about the booklet that the school had produced linking language and learning. They could recall occasions when they had used it on the teachers' instructions, but they had made no voluntary or spontaneous reference to it.

Teachers often get enthusiastic about approaches to learning that they believe will help their students. Accelerated Learning is an example, enthusiastically taken up and applied to students. Again, the talk is about learning styles. How far the students benefit may be glimpsed from the following example. A Y6 boy had been identified as a visual learner in some kind of test. I asked him how this had helped him.

Stan Um, Ms F said that if you are an auditory learner you do this, and if you're a kinaesthetic learner you do this and if you're a visual learner you-. When someone's showing you how to do something, you watch how they do it and then you repeat what they do, instead of watching what they do and then watching what you're doing or using your hands and going along with what they are doing at the same time (Pri 1 Y6).

This is rather a muddled account that does not sound very secure, and we should note that it is not Stan's account, but his teacher's.

Meta-cognition requires the development of language of learning: students can talk about learning, know the difference between analysis and summarising, for example. The conversations I had with the young people are in themselves evidence of the young people's ability to talk about learning although for many it was an unfamiliar experience. Some of the discussions were very tense. They began as a concurrent series of interviews with individuals and slowly developed into discussions with a flow of their own. Part of the difficulty was the young people had to work out how they were being expected to talk about their learning, what kind of language to use. Often they found it very difficult. My session with Y6 students needed three attempts to get the youngsters to say something about what it meant to be a good learner. I was consciously trying to avoid a construction that used the term work. This often meant that my questions sounded a little alien, out of the normal discourse. In my conversations with the young people I found that grounding the talk in shared experiences in the classroom it became possible to talk about their experiences of learning.

Two schools were explicit about the importance of developing language. In Primary 2, the headteacher had suggested that the pressure of content meant that the teachers did not have enough time to discuss their learning with children and develop a discourse of learning with them. One teacher had introduced some talking about learning, as I have described above, but was conscious of the need to develop their skills further. She reported that her Y3 class found it hard to go beyond identifying the content of their learning in their class discussions. She suggested that this was because "it's not really discussed", that is the children are not familiar with this kind of talk. She herself felt that one of the benefits of participating in the project had been that it gave her the unwonted luxury of time to think about learning. She suggested that the numeracy strategy was helpful, because it encouraged explicitness and verbalising about different processes. She described an occasion when she had been explicit with the

youngsters about the language of enquiry that they used in pair or group activities.

Ms J ... And I think that's what a lot of this learning about learning stuff can do. It about them being aware of what they are wanting to find out and where they are going with it and how they are going to get there. That was quite interesting and that raised that with them. And that's still quite a lot of their discussion around those kind of things (Pri 2 T1).

The headteacher of Secondary 1 was an English teacher and had considerable success in a previous school as head of department in developing ideas about learning, especially related to language development (including additional language acquisition). Developing a shared language of learning was a key thrust of their learning initiative.

Ms R ... we wanted to develop a language to talk about learning, a shared language as a staff but also, for the pupils (Sec 1 HT).

This statement indicates how easy it is to remain focused on teachers. The development will be "as a staff" - that is together - but "for the pupils" - that is given to them. The booklet was indeed written by staff and given to the students. It explicitly links learning, thinking and language as this introductory statement indicates:

This book is about the way you think and learn.

Thinking and learning depend on language.

These are some of the different kind of thinking we use.

[a pictogram of different thinking types: planning, evaluating, analysing, brainstorming etc].

When you are thinking about the kind of thinking you are using to carry out a task, you are gaining an understanding of the way you learn.

Being aware of how we think and learn is called Metacognition.

Different types of thinking are suitable for different types of tasks. Part of being good at the task is knowing which kind of thinking to use and the language that goes with it.

(From *Language for Thinking and Learning*) emphasis in original.

As I mentioned the students did not use this booklet as their teachers believed or hoped. Developing language was a theme of Ms R’s description of this programme in school, including for higher order skills:

Ms R We needed to make sure that when we tried to help children to develop their higher order skills we were developing the language with which they could [?mediate], introduce those skills. ... And I do think that with some of the children we have here, because of their experiences haven’t been exposed to that language and don’t get a lot of opportunity to think and talk at those higher levels, we have really got to keep pushing those and giving them the opportunity (Sec 1 HT).

A Literacy Task Group had been set up and, according to its chair, it soon became the Learning Task Group. The group took a cross-curricular approach and has led initiatives within the school on a range of learning initiatives: developing writing frameworks, the language booklet, Start of Day Activities, gender issues and marking and feedback. Some of the teachers used process words to describe the nature of the activity of the lesson. In the Y10 English lesson I observed, the teacher drew attention, during the course of the 50-minute lesson, to the following:

- | | |
|------------|-------------|
| hypothesis | prediction |
| selection | comparison |
| annotation | summarising |
| brainstorm | feedback. |

The emphasis on language is, perhaps, not surprising in an English teacher. But every subject team, in this school, had drawn up a list of process words, and these are published in the *Language for Thinking and Learning* booklet, given to every student and displayed in every classroom. Teachers sometimes referred to ‘the taxonomy page’ (see Appendix 6) which sets out levels of thinking (from knowledge to evaluation) and lists process and product words next to each level. It was evident in talking with teachers in this school that many of them had been involved in thinking about language and learning and that this process had

enriched their practice. The impact on students' learning was there, but more difficult to discern.

Conclusion

The rich discourse of learning is present in schools – in the documentation, in practice in the classrooms and in the discourse of some teachers and of some students. Looking at the evidence of this discourse it is clear that it is only emergent in some places, fragile, quiet and easily displaced. The connectivity that young people seek is challenged by teachers perceived need to cover the National Curriculum, and as a result of the press for performance, compliance and control they learn in classroom conditions that do not promote connection to their external world, or even to their peers. Students have little expectation of being active learners, as a norm, or of collaboration. They see that responsibility for their learning is with the teacher. The press of all these means that learning about learning can appear as a luxury, rather than a strategy to improve learning. Yet this richer discourse of learning is present in schools. I met teachers who are struggling to engage the students in dialogues about learning. And I talked with students who are struggling to find their own voice through this discourse.

Chapter 9. Discussion – *rarely is the question asked, is our children learning?*¹

My main purpose in this study has been to describe the discourses of learning I found in four schools. In this chapter I consider the impact of the discourses on the learning of young people and the implications of the discourses described in the previous chapters. The chapter includes sections on each of the following:

- Main findings
- Issues for learning
- The work of the discourses of learning
- Sources of hope

One purpose of undertaking this research was to consider how discourses impact on learning.

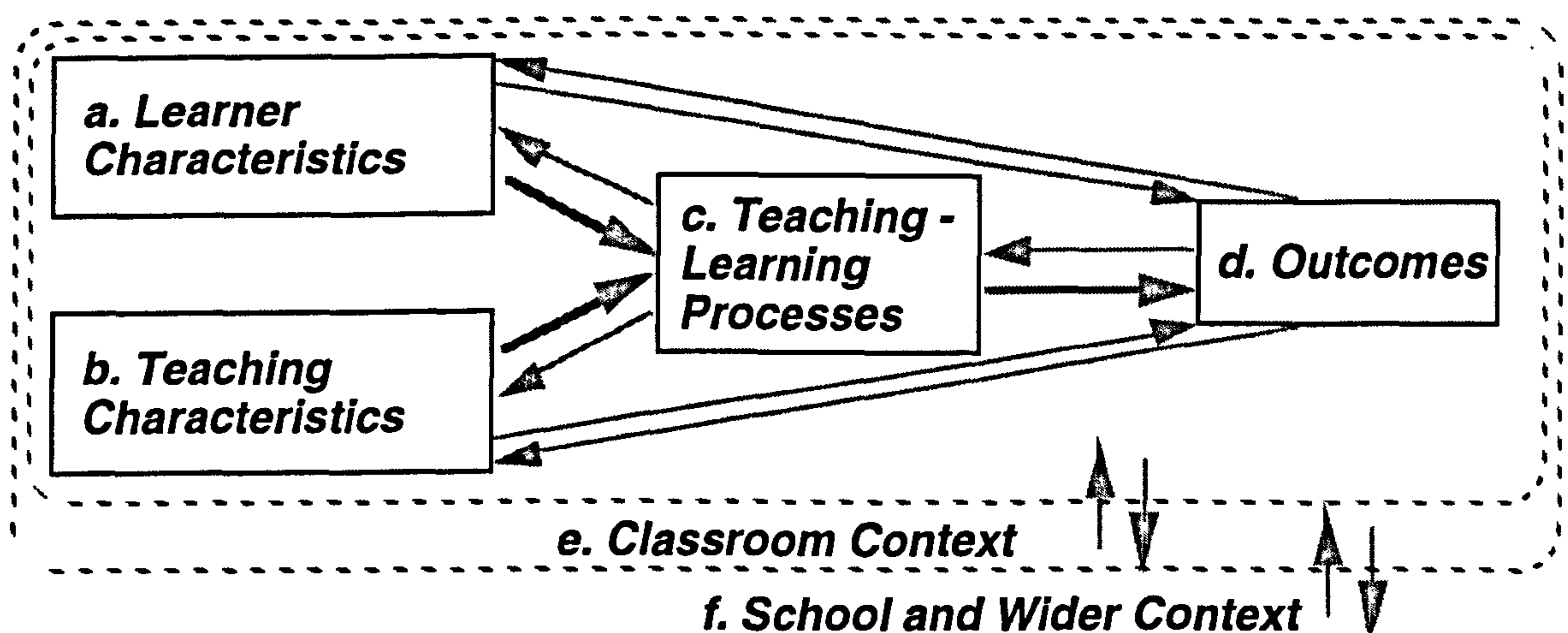


Figure 9.1: A contextual model for school learning, developed from Biggs & Moore (1993) (Watkins *et al*, 1996).

¹ This is a question attributed to George W. Bush, during the 2000 US presidential election.

Learning in school depends upon the interaction of several components: learner and teaching characteristics, teaching-learning processes, their outcomes and the contexts of learning. In *Effective Learning* (Watkins *et al*, 1996) we developed the above model of school learning (Figure 9.1). In this model we included two-way arrows to indicate that the components of the model are reciprocally related. The discourses of learning influence both teachers' and learners' understandings of learning. Their beliefs and discourses are not brought complete and immutable to the schools. They are influenced by the talk, behaviour and reactions of others. Discourses of learning in a school influence and are influenced in turn by each of the components in the model (figure 9.1).

The main findings

My first conclusion from this study is that there is evidence of all three discourses – of performance, work and learning – in operation in the schools I studied. The descriptions of the three discourses do appear to represent what I heard in the schools. Furthermore these three discourses appear to account for most of language in use concerning learning. The analysis of the data could perhaps have used different categories. But the three discourses described in the earlier chapters are supported by the detailed analysis. The inconsistencies and dissonances provided opportunities for examining conflicts. These three are not the only discourses, of course. I also heard discourses about the learner, rather than learning. These related to learners' behaviour, to motivation and to the fragility of the learner. These learner discourses reflect the belief that young people have requirements that need to be satisfied before they can learn, such as motivation or self-esteem. Where they operated in the schools I studied these ideas replaced attention to learning. None were quite so specific as the headteacher of Secondary 2 who said that the school's priority was to ensure that the young people were happy and secure and that learning took second place.

The second main finding is that in the four schools the dominant discourses were the more meagre ones of performance and work. Both teachers and young people operated within these two discourses. The teachers felt the impact of pressure for performance more directly than the young people. The dominance

of these discourses was found in these schools, despite choosing schools that have explicitly intended to develop the teachers' professional views of learning. The third discourse could be heard, but it struggled.

It seems that two discourses overlap. The discourses of performance and work share one important feature: they both draw on meagre views of learning, especially on the transmission-reception view of teaching and learning. They share a view of the roles and relationships of teachers and learners, seeing them as separate, hierarchical and the learner as dependent on the teacher. The knowledge or information flows from teacher to learner. They share an epistemological position that knowledge is like a commodity, to be passed on to the passive student. Nevertheless, the discourses differ in important respects: in one discourse the learner must perform, and be publicly evaluated on that performance. In the other the emphasis is on production, on activity that brings forth a concrete, often individual, usually written product.

There were some surprises, especially things I expected to find but did not. The first was the absence of discourse about competition. I have made some comments on this in Chapter 6, in the discussion on the discourse of performance.

Another surprise was the absence of discourse involving the concept of ability. We know from other studies that teachers make early judgements about the ability of their students (Cooper & McIntyre, 1996) and that many have a strong belief that ability is a major factor determining young people's achievement, alongside home background (Morgan & Morris, 1999). Perhaps it is such a strong assumption that teachers do not articulate it, especially to a fellow teacher, which is how I positioned myself. The young people themselves did not refer to ability in any of the conversations I had with them, nor did I hear them make any references to ability in the classroom. I am bemused by the absence of talk about ability, or the related concepts of intelligence, aptitude, brightness, giftedness and talent and so forth. Another possibility is that ability is an aspect of the discourse of the learner, not of learning. Further research would be necessary to develop a more informed view about this absence.

A third surprise was the absence of a richer understanding of learning by teachers, including the younger ones who might be expected to have come into contact with constructivist ideas, for example, in their initial training. Morgan and Morris (1999) indicated that teachers do not talk much about learning, but the discursive practices that I recorded reveal that when they do they frequently draw on a meagre view of learning. While this maybe the case, many were working against the grain. In particular the headteachers in the four schools were encouraging a richer view, supported by other teachers. This absence among teachers may account for some of the issues for learning to which we now turn.

Issues for Learning

In the previous three chapters describing the discourses I drew attention to four issues. These were the contexts of learning, teachers' difficulties in managing the performance agenda alongside good practice in the school, the teacher-centred view of learning in the schools and the difficulty of developing a shared language. These are now considered together to raise issues about learning in schools.

The classroom context for learning required by the discourses of performance and work requires teacher control to create isolated students focused on physical restraint and writing activities - "just you, a pen and a piece of paper" (Sec 2 Y10). Effective learning requires the learner to be active and collaborative, take responsibility for their learning and to engage in meta-learning (Watkins *et al*, 1996). "Sitting down and writing" in isolation are conditions that work against effective learning. The views of learning as both work and performance encourage these conditions because they emphasise activity and control in order to achieve a concrete product for evaluation. The effects of being held to account as individual teachers, and as a school, reinforce this. Wallace (1996) made similar observations about the conditions that affect young people's engagement with learning, reporting on interviews with young people. The implications of the isolated, inactive learner remain significant. Wallace, and her colleagues

recommended that more attention be paid to what students said about their learning experiences.

The second issue, raised in the discussion of the discourse of performance, concerns the conflicts that teachers are experiencing at the interface of the performativity discourse and practices of the policy context and their school practice. One primary teacher described the tension in this way:

The problem with that can be that we rush to finish it and it's not good quality. It's a very delicate balance to get the best out of them and yet get it done. Yeah, finished. It's the finishing off that's the bind in primary school (Pri 2).

She was finding that the increased pressure on the students did not result in what she called "real learning". She was finding it hard to keep this balance. She went on to finish her discussion with me in this way:

That's what I think, but I might well be wrong. I'm still learning after 25 years. It's still hard work and I sure wouldn't do it again. It's such hard work. I know why people don't go into teaching. Well it is rewarding, but it's very hard [emphasised]. I mean I do love kids but I've gone off them (Pri 2).

There is ambivalence in this teacher's statement. She says, "I do love kids, but I've gone off them" - contradictory statements that are both expressed in the present tense. Trying to balance unreconcilable alternatives is dispiriting. The tensions are held within the schools, sometimes within individual teachers as we can see, and often passed on to the young people who are under pressure to perform.

There were tensions in each of the schools. All four were engaged in programmes designed to develop learning in the school, and given the dominance of the discourses of work and performance it is apparent that in this they are working against the grain. They have the weight of historical tradition as well as the policy context as counter-forces. Later in this chapter I will explore the forces that encourage the richer discourse of learning. Here it is worth remembering that much research suggests that a focus on performance will depress performance, but an emphasis on learning will enhance learning and performance (Watkins, 2001).

The third issue is the focus on teachers. Morgan and Morris' study confirmed that students largely see their learning as dependent on their teachers (1999). The students in the four schools produced evidence to support this. Indeed, some teachers in my study also spoke and behaved as though this is the case. Teaching and the teacher have been emphasised in policy to improve schools, based on an assumption that young people learn from teaching. Not all teaching results in learning and an emphasis on teaching downplays the importance of the other factors in the learning model (figure 9.1), not least the learner characteristics. Some of the initiatives adopted by the schools to promote effective learning (a focus on learning styles, target setting, experiments such as juggling) were experienced by the students as done to them by their teachers. Putting young people more centrally in the learning requires engagement about learning between teachers and learners. Involving the young people in dialogue about learning is not easy as the discussion about targets in the previous chapter shows. The young people found that some discussions in which the teachers wanted to engage them had the contrary effect of excluding them because they were not drawn from the students' experiences. There will be no dialogue until conversation is grounded in students' talk and engages in their discourse. This mismatching of language was the fourth significant issue identified in the discussion on discourses. A rich discourse of learning that empowers young people and allows them access to more complexity and sophistication must be grounded in a shared language with the young people.

These four issues overlap, and reinforce each other and the difficulties schools face in moving the teachers and students towards a richer view of learning. This study has suggested that discourses influence the views of learning and the behaviours of teachers and students. Changing the discourse may help change the practice.

The work of discourses of learning

This study has affirmed the importance of the discourse context. The access to different discourses provides choice, knowledge of difference, support for tentative attempts at a new discourse, a new understanding. The young people

are exposed to different discourses, the folk discourses active in the contexts in which they live, the discourses operating in their schools and in the particular classrooms and the particular teachers with whom they come into contact. They have their own priorities too, with which the discourses of learning may be in competition. Schools may be intended as places for learning, but youngsters have their own purposes in attending school, which may or may not include learning. As we noted in Chapter 3, many students appear to see school primarily as a social experience (Duffield *et al*, 2000).

Discourses operate at different scales, each layer in the school acts as a context for other layers: whole-school, classroom, individual. As a result the discourses have two-way influences, as indicated in figure 9.1. The implications of this for learning in schools are profound, and may explain why improvement efforts have been intense but not yielded a much result, why schools are finding it so hard to achieve more effective learning (Gray *et al*, 1999). The overall picture is that there is often an absence of the richer discourses of learning in schools, in all the sites explored: between teachers, between students and teachers and between teachers and their pupils. Where a richer discourse of learning operated it was in conflict with or sitting uncomfortably alongside other discourses.

In Chapter 3 I suggested that the research indicated that the key processes for discourses to operate in classrooms and schools included the following:

- the presence of a variety of discourses in the school's activities,
- opportunities for students and teachers to become familiar with the discourses through talk,
- the presence of discourse guides, such as teachers or other already familiar with the discourses,
- teachers framing activities within the discourses,
- students engaging in activities related to the discourses,
- school factors that support or marginalise different learning discourses,

- dominant discourses in the school's environment,
- factors that support or marginalise the dominant learning discourses in the school's environment.

The four schools had managed to encourage some of these processes, supported by programmes of teacher professional development, involvement in projects on effective learning and the production of materials to promote connections between language and learning. In all the schools people from outside the school had supported the process. External forces also work against the richer discourse.

One factor is the performance agenda of the government. As I was writing this thesis, the white paper *Schools Achieving Success* (DfES, 2001) was published. The thrust of the work of this discourse can be seen in the frequent and almost interchangeable use of the words performance, achievement, standards and targets. Learning is represented as an outcome of good teaching. This discourse is frequently to be found in policy documents from government agencies. The policy discourse impacts on schools (through the school improvement and effectiveness policy discourses that complement the accountability agenda monitored by OFSTED). As we have seen, it has an impact on individual teachers (through performance management and accountability, monitored internally and by OFSTED). In turn this is passed on to the students.

The official discourses are not the only ones at work as has been shown. Trainee teachers, for example, have to learn to operate within the official discourse to gain entry to the profession. They are also exposed to the views of lecturers, mentors, fellow beginner teachers, the teachers with whom they share staffrooms and the students they meet in classrooms. The official discourse is moderated through interpretation and translation into practice. So it is with students in schools. The extracts quoted in this study indicate a variety of discourses current within the same school and class. They are in a constant state of flux and tension with each other.

There are some worrying features of this official discourse in operation despite the presence of alternatives. The official discourse favours performance and pushes responsibility down through the system, to local authorities, to schools and to teachers. As we have noted some teachers pass on the pressure to the students. Schools are held accountable for the performance of their students, expected to demonstrate continuous improvement (Gray, 2000), whatever the difficulties at a systemic level or locally. The pressure produces distortions. Schools adopt strategies that are likely to make most impact on the figures upon which they will be judged: these are likely to focus on the young people at the borderline of GCSE grades C and D, taking no account of equity issues (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). My own daughter pointed this out as a Y9 student, about to experience the very first SATs. "I thought schools existed to help me, but they say I should do well in the SATs so that the school can say it is doing well."

It is not only the official policy discourse that should worry us. We might note that some of the apparently more learning-focused programmes such as Accelerated Learning are very appealing to teachers. One reason may be that they promise better performance in tests, without much evidence. Another reason is that they are teacher-centred. Accelerated learning, and the emphasis on learning styles which I noted in one primary school, can appeal to those with teacher-centred or behaviourist views about learning: apply Mozart, water or juggling and stimulate better learning! Many Accelerated Learning strategies equate learning with memorisation but do not address the more complex understandings of learning. Simplistic ideas about learning styles are therefore not absorbed (see Stan, Pri 1 Y6 and Y10 Sec 1, discussed in Chapter 8). Young people are able to deal with more complexity in their learning and from an earlier age than is commonly assumed (Pramling, 1990).

While it is true that young people frequently learn despite their teachers, rather than because of them, this study has also presented examples of a rich discourse operating in their classrooms and outside. There is Ms J and her Y3 class, who had been learning about learning. There is Ms D's Y10 maths lesson on frequency curves. The language used by both teachers, about learning, was rich

with process words. They shared responsibility for learning with their class, set appropriate activities, connected the lesson content to the lives of their students and encouraged reflection and self-awareness. These are features of effective learning (Watkins *et al*, 1996). I have referred to just two examples. There were others, although they were often small-scale, isolated and not pursued in the face of difficulties. Changing teachers' practice sometimes means taking small steps, because sometimes this leads to a big shift in outcomes for young people. However, working at a whole-school level can reinforce these more modest efforts, especially where the headteacher puts learning at the centre of the school's activities and discourse.

Some schools appear to find it possible to give more prominence to richer discourses of learning, as described in Chapter 8. The rich discourses are not strong in the face of others. What can be done to promote discourses that favour effective learning in schools?

Sources of hope

To promote effective learning and effective learners in schools requires a discursive shift, or at least a continuous series of discursive nudges. The evidence from this study suggests that the following are sources of hope, processes that can promote the richer discourse:

- listening to what students say about their learning,
- engaging with the students in dialogue about their learning,
- buffering the pressure for performativity,
- promoting talk about learning between teachers and students,
- encouraging a richer discourse of learning at all levels and between all those involved in young people's learning: in the written statements and guidance, in management and development processes (such as planning) and between governors, parents, teachers, support staff, students and others involved in learning,

- a headteacher who reminds teachers that the function of school is to be a place for students to learn before they are places where teachers teach.
- monitoring the discursive practices of the school.

Students I spoke with want to become more actively involved in their learning, not just through physical activity but through collaborative activities. By encouraging meta-learning, by helping young people learn about their own learning, teachers would be more able to share the responsibility for learning. Because discourse both influences and is influenced by practice the development of practice needs to go hand in hand with discursive engagement.

Chapter 10. Conclusions - *so you learn things*

This chapter describes how this study has made a contribution to educational knowledge and to my professional development. I began this study by outlining a concern about the thinness or meagreness of the discourses of learning in our schools. The study has provided a description of the discourses in four schools. These schools had all been engaged in developmental programmes about learning. It is a rather depressing picture, then, if the schools that might be expected to have the richest discourses of learning are dominated by discourses of work and performance.

This study uses discursive study to contribute to knowledge about learning in schools. Its particular contribution is to link the discourses of learning to different understandings of learning, and to consider the implications for the learning of young people. The particular features of discourses and the study of language in use in schools have been under-researched in the past. There are four ways in which this study is innovative. First the way in which views of learning are socially constructed has had little previous attention. The focus has been on discovering individual views of learning. Second, I have explored the importance of the context in the operation of these discourses: of the individual classroom, school and the national policy context. Third, I have explored the constitutive function of discourse, the ways in which discourses construct views of learning. Richer discourse can contribute to learners' development of effective learning strategies. Finally, I have suggested that it is possible for teachers to develop richer discourses of learning in schools and indicated some ways in which schools are supporting this at an organisational level. Schools could exploit this.

Our understanding of learning in schools needs to reflect the complexity of learning processes and discourse analysis of various kinds can contribute to this enquiry. Our understanding of 'what works' can also become more sophisticated, especially at the interface of the school and its context. School effectiveness and improvement literature has created a view of schools as

sealed institutions, where the non-school factors can be isolated and discounted. Schools are then be held to account and blamed for poor performance. But the discourse boundaries are not sealed any more than the physical boundaries are. Adults and children cross the boundaries every day and they use discourse as they come and go.

Teachers and researchers must engage in continuous dialogue with young people about their learning. Teachers developing learning programmes without this connection to young people can repeat patterns of the past, "doing learning to the children" as one teacher I met described it (Sec 1 HT).

I have been fortunate that this study has enabled me to add a dimension to my own professional activity by studying learning in schools. My professional life involves me in research, lecturing and other forms of teaching, learning and consultancy work. Each of these areas has been enhanced by this study, through the development of skills and knowledge. Firstly I have enhanced my understanding of issues in researching discursive practice. I have developed my research and analytical skills and understood the limits of my ability to sustain a concentrated writing project. Despite this I intend to continue the exploration, looking at a number of different aspects of learning: the classroom conditions that encourage effective learning, strategies for helping young people develop the richer discourses, for example.

I have learned a great deal about my own learning through this project. At times learning has required hard work and the endurance that I referred to as a feature of the discourse of learning as work: to paraphrase, it has been "me (one), my keyboard and computer screen". At other times I have wondered whether this labour was worth the performance outcome. Here is a "wodge of paper" and it has been produced for evaluation purposes. I have felt sympathy for some weeks with the design and technology students who did not want to redo work because they had learned what they wanted from it. But I have learned a great deal about learning, about my own learning, have

enriched my own discourse and, to the extent that I have been able to share my findings with others, it may have enriched theirs too.

Finally, I have come to see things in a different way, much more aware of the relational aspects of so much that we treat as individual activity. Discourse is created through social activity and is an expression of social activity. Young people's understanding of learning and the product of their learning are partly an outcome of relationships, with adults (teachers and parents in particular) and other learners. It is in the connections between people and between the components of the model (figure 9.1) that improving learning lies.

Perhaps most significantly I return to where I started, with Annie.

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time (T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*).

I find myself now understanding in a new way the significance of Annie's statement that originally pointed the way to this place:

Annie: You learn more because if you explain to people what to do, you say things that you wouldn't say to yourself, really. So you learn things that you wouldn't know if you were just doing it by yourself (Lodge, 1997: 7).

In writing this thesis I have had to explain to people and I have said things that I would not have said to myself. Like Annie, I have learned things that I would not have learned unless I had engaged in communicating with others.

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Appendix 1: Brief Description of the Four Schools.

Secondary 1.

Large, mixed, comprehensive school, with a 6th form, on the outskirts of a large Midlands city.

Secondary 2.

Large, mixed, comprehensive school, with a small 6th form, in an outer London borough.

Primary 1.

Large, mixed, junior and infant school with a nursery class, in an outer London borough.

Primary 2.

Mixed, junior and infant school, in inner London.

Appendix 2: Summary of Research Events: Interviews and Lessons

Pupil interviews

Year group	School and lesson	School and lesson
Y11	Sec 1 Geography*	
Y10	Sec 1 English	Sec 2 Business Studies
Y9	Sec 2 Maths	
Y6	Pri 1 Special lesson	
Y4	Pri 1 Science	
Y 3/4	Pri 2 Literacy	
Y3	Pri 2 Literacy	
Y1	Pri 1 Literacy	Pri 2 Literacy

* Y11 students were interviewed during their geography lesson. All other interviews took place immediately following the lesson indicated.

Teacher Interviews

- Secondary 1: Headteacher, SENCO.
- Secondary 2: Two teachers (PE, English and project Co-ordinator).
- Primary 1: Headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Primary 2: Headteacher, and two class teachers (Y3 & Y4).

Lesson Observations

Secondary School Lessons	Primary School Lessons
Science	Literacy – 3
English – 3	Science
Maths – 2	Numeracy
Geography	Special lesson
Business Studies	
PE – 3	
Y7 Literacy	
Media Studies	
History	

A total of 20 lessons were observed: 14 in the secondary schools (4 in Sec 1, 10 in Sec 2) and 6 in the primary schools (3 in each).

Appendix 3: Sample interview schedule.

My name is Caroline Lodge. I want to find out what you think about some things to do with learning. I am talking to lots of students and teachers in schools. I am a student at London University, and I am trying to understand more about what people mean when they talk about learning. I am the only person who will hear the tape and read what you say in full. But I will be feeding back, without names, what is said the headteacher, because the school wants to learn from this too.

What was the best bit in that lesson?

What did you learn in that lesson?

Why are you learning this?

What helped your learning?

What got in the way?

What do you do when you get stuck? - in that lesson?

Do you like learning with others? – What helps you to learn with others?

How do you know when your learning is going well?

What does it feel like?

How is learning in school different from learning outside school? – tell me about some out of school learning?

How do you know when someone is a good learner? ... what do you see them do?

Appendix 4: A note on codings used in transcriptions.

The conversations were transcribed selectively.

Punctuation was added to indicate the phrasing and to reflect the coherence of the speakers where possible.

Omissions are indicated [...].

Short pauses are indicated [.]

Interruptions are indicated in this example

CML If you got a bit stuck, Boyd, did you use the number squares or did you -

Boyd - no I carried on -

CML use your fingers or what?

Boyd I just was using my fingers -

Inaudible or unclear words are represented [?inaudible] or [?suggested word].

Items in square brackets provide significant non-spoken information, such as tone of voice, laughter, or clarifying information.

CML is the author, who carried out all interviews.

Each extract indicates the school and year group (eg Sec 1 Y10) of the speaker/s.

All names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Appendix 5: Looking at Learning about Learning

These lists were taken from Primary 2, Y3 classroom and record the categories of things the students said help them in their learning.

Doing:

helping sharing singing concentrating
 focusing talking practising listening
 watching writing travelling quiet thinking
 copying co-operating reading playing

People:

brothers friends other family sisters
 other children parents doctors teachers

Feelings:

past experience energy support
 safe patience happy encouragement
 confidence comfortable positivity time

Things:

fingers 100 squares information posters
 instructions books computers white boards
 OHP number lines TV maps labels.

Appendix 6: Taxonomy of Thinking - from *Language for Thinking and Learning* (Sec 1).

Level of Thinking	Process	Products
EVALUATION	Judge. Evaluate. Give opinion. Viewpoint. Prioritise. Recommend. Critique.	Decision. Rating/Grades. Editorial. Debate. Critique. Defence/Verdict.
SYNTHESIS	Compose. Design. Invent. Create. Hypothesise. Construct. Forecast. Imagine. Rearrange parts.	Lesson Plan. Song. Poem. Story. Invention.
ANALYSIS	Investigate. Classify. Categorise. Compare. Contrast. Solve.	Survey. Questionnaire. Plan. Solution. Report. Prospectus.
APPLICATION	Demonstrate. Use Guides. Maps. Charts etc. Build. Cook.	Recipe. Model. Artwork. Demonstration. Crafts.
COMPREHENSION	Restate. Give examples. Explain. Summarise. Translate. Edit. Show symbols.	Drawing. Diagram. Response to question. Revision.
KNOWLEDGE	Tell. Recite. List. Memorise. Remember. Define. Locate.	Workbook pages. Quiz. Test. Exam. Vocabulary. Facts in isolation.